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## **By F. Schuyler Mathews**

Field Book of American Wild Flowers

Field Book of Wild Birds and Their Music

Field Book of American Trees and Shrubs

The Book of Birds for Young People

The Book of Wild Flowers for Young People

### ***Companion Books***

The Field Book of Insects

*By Frank E. Lutz*

Field Book of Western Wild Flowers

*By Margaret Armstrong*

# The Book of Birds for Young People









Great Blue Heron

# THE BOOK OF BIRDS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

BY

F. SCHUYLER MATHEWS

AUTHOR OF "FIELD BOOK OF WILD BIRDS AND THEIR MUSIC"  
"FIELD BOOK OF AMERICAN WILD FLOWERS," ETC.

WITH 67 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR  
AND 28 IN BLACK AND WHITE  
BY THE AUTHOR

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON  
The Knickerbocker Press

Copyright, 1921

by

F. Schuyler Mathews

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Made in the United States of America



MsL  
Col

To

EDWIN SCHUYLER HUBBARD

MY BOON COMPANION, YOUTHFUL STUDENT

OF THE WOODLAND SINGERS

THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

1979



## PREFACE

IN using the term Young People in the title of this book it would be best to explain at the outset that I mean any or all young persons from five to *fifty* years of age including those wiser ones of the high-school age, or just a bit beyond.

Now it has occurred to me that perhaps we grown-ups fail to appreciate that the intelligent child is quite as much interested in some topic of conversation such as natural history, art, or music as we ourselves are who, it may be, have passed the half-century mile-stone in the journey of life. But I do not myself believe for one moment that these grown-ups entertain a more lively interest in bird-life than the great majority of thinking young people. When, for instance, some enthusiastic, nature-loving, little girl of ten takes you by the hand and leads you triumphantly to the tree where she has discovered the Hummingbird's nest, how do you explain the fact that *she* made the discovery and not someone a great deal older who passed that way just as often?

Again, if an observant boy finds a Yellow Warbler's nest hidden beneath a cluster of yellow Scotch

roses and is urgently solicitous that you should enjoy the sight of the nesting bird as well as himself, is it not likely that he would be glad to learn from you whence the little stranger came, by what route over land and sea, and why she should choose Massachusetts for an abiding place or might fly far beyond to the great north country the other side of Hudson Bay? When you explain it all, look in his glowing eyes and judge for yourself whether he is interested or not. If, also, some student with an investigating turn of mind asks you how the birds came to migrate in the first place, and for what reason some stay with you through the winter and others do not, is it not well to explain the simple facts of migration in the simplest way so he may build upon them in the future and solve a few relative problems for himself? I surely think so.

We can tell very nearly, at times, what a bird is thinking about and what it might say if it had the gift of speech; so why not put the speech in his bill? We talk glibly about the instinct of animals and the reason of man, yet the one seems to lap over the other so frequently that an arbitrary line drawn between them usually results in a confusing passage through an intermediary mix-up! I believe, therefore, that the human point of view of the song language of birds is a perfectly rational one even if it savors of romance.

It seems to me the young person is always interested in facts if they are clearly stated. If a bird's circular nest is circular because she has spun it by turning—slowly, of course—round and round like a top, it is worth while to say so, and when the opportunity offers the child will intelligently observe the process. If a bird's song is pitched so high that often a portion or all of it is beyond the limit of the piano keyboard, it should prove interesting to see upon the musical staff just where the song is, and to know that if one whistles in faithful imitation and correct pitch, the bird is likely to respond.

A great deal of experience and study is necessary to obtain a broad knowledge of bird-life, but with patience and perseverance both boys and girls have very often acquired an extensive acquaintance with common and sometimes uncommon birds which their elders would have been glad, indeed, in some measure to share. This book is intended to stimulate that interest in our little feathered friends by relating not imaginary but real experiences in the localities described. So late as February, 1921, the Pine Grosbeaks were seen on Mt. Tecumseh, Waterville, N. H., and they proved to be nearly as tame in company of the mountain climbers then as they were a number of years earlier in the presence of the boy in this story.



The account of the migrations toward the end of the book is based upon personal experience together with data selected from many sources. I was glad to include something of interest relative to the music of the Gray-cheeked Thrush from Mr. Eliot Blackwelder's article on the "Summer Birds of the Upper Yukon Region, Alaska," appearing in the *Auk*, for January, 1919, and also some facts about the migrations of the Blackpoll Warbler from C. J. Maynard's *Warblers of New England*. I am especially indebted to Prof. Wells W. Cooke of the Biological Survey for data gathered from his *Bulletin No. 18*, on the "Distribution and Migration of North American Warblers," 1904. If some of my conclusions do not appear exactly to correspond with those of other authors, the differences could be only slight and would be due wholly to calculations based upon my own observations and experience. I am much indebted, also, to Messrs. Small, Maynard & Co., for the privilege of quoting from that delightful book, *Labrador*, by William Brooks Cabot, to Mr. Outram Bangs for his courteous assistance in the examination of Museum specimens, and to Mr. Walter Deane, Mr. Walter G. Cady, and Mr. H. W. Weisgerber for photographs from which certain pictures have been reproduced.

F. SCHUYLER MATHEWS.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., April, 1921.

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# The Book of Birds for Young People

Have you ever heard of the Sing-away Bird,  
That sings where the Runaway River  
Runs down with its rills from the bald-headed hills  
That stand in the sunshine and shiver ?  
“ Oh, sing ! sing-away ! sing-away ! sing-away ! ”  
How the pines and the beeches are stirred  
By the trill of the Sing-away bird !

. . . . .

'Tis a White-throated Sparrow that sped the light arrow  
Of song from his musical quiver,  
And it pierced with its spell every valley and dell  
On the banks of the Runaway River.  
“ Oh, sing ! sing-away ! sing-away ! sing-away ! ”  
The song of a wild singer had  
The sound of a soul that is glad.

LUCY LARCOM.

# The Book of Birds For Young People

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST VOICES OF SPRING

THE blustering month of March was just beginning to show it did not belong in the middle of winter by calming down and exhibiting broad patches of bare ground everywhere. A few chilly snowdrops were snuggled close to the house to keep warm, and in the old maple on the other side of the road there were scores of red buds in plain sight along with a lonely Robin who was cheerily caroling the news that spring had come, in spite of what one might call bare evidence to the contrary.

Through the window an apparently much interested boy gazed whose keen blue eyes bore a puzzled expression. "Parter," he exclaimed, "what do you suppose that Robin sings for?" Now Parter, who was seated near, reading his paper, had borne that



title in place of Grandfather for several long years, in fact, ever since the once baby lips had formed its substitute for the other impossible long-drawn-out word; it had clung.

“Well,” answered the grandfather, “that is an easy question to answer although Robin has never told me why he prefers singing to talking.” He laid his paper aside to explain. “You see, when you have a hard, horny bill instead of a mobile—that is rubbery—mouth, you cannot grin like the cat, show your teeth like the dog, laugh when you feel jolly, or growl and display a gleaming row of white ivories when you are hopping mad like the Bengal tiger—and how ever are you to pronounce the tongue-twisting Indian name of that lake down in Maine called Mooselookmeguntic? The truth is, a bill may be a very convenient thing with which to dig up worms, but it is also a very inconvenient and awkward finish to your face when it comes to expressing your feelings or talking! It is true a bird may wink his eye, but that doesn’t count for much. Owls, and all other birds for that matter, have a fashion of half closing their eyes with a queer sort of thin, third eyelid called—and you must not smile if I tell you—the Nictitating membrane; there! you did smile, and that is more than Robin can do. Many of the animals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians—the turtle

is one, in and out of water, you know—have that third eyelid. The name is curious, for, to nictitate means to wink. I suppose some original observer invented it when he first saw the Owl half close his eye and thought the bird was indulging in a prolonged wink—like the smile we hear of that won't come off,—but he just happened to nictitate his nictitating eyelid! The expression of his face is hopelessly fixed, which makes you feel like throwing something at it to effect any kind of an alteration. The trouble is, there's no charming smile to keep the wink company, and a wink all alone by itself suggests nothing, not even tender mice or fledging birds to an Owl, much less candy or peanuts to a boy like you!

“And now you may perhaps understand why Robin sings—he expresses himself with the only means at his disposal. What he sings *for* is another matter; if, as somebody has suggested, smiling is laughing in a whisper, then singing is often laughing in poetry. Robin is therefore a happy poet, jingling to Miss Robin, somewhere, ‘*Come live with me and be my love and we will all the pleasures prove that hill and valley, dale and field, or woods or steepy mountains yield*’—*come, build a nest in this old tree.*’ He may not be able to smile or wink

**Robin**

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love*.

## 6 BOOK OF BIRDS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

at her, but he can at least sing loud enough for her to hear him at any reasonable distance. If I imitate his whistle, he seems to listen and reply. He may be telling me about his chances for worms, grubs, bugs, and the like, but I doubt it. It is far more likely he mistakes me for a rival bird trying to wheedle Miss Robin away from him and he is jealous; in that case the burden of his song would be, *'Here am I, Sally dear, mind your eye, do you hear? Come to me, come at once, can't you see he's a dunce, I'm a peach, he's a nut! I beseech—pooh, don't listen to another word he says.'* And there you are, Boy Blue, the bird sings because it is the easiest way to express his feelings, and you know any of us can say things gladly, or madly, or sadly in song; it is a sort of universal language which all the world understands."

"Yes, I see, Parter, but couldn't you take me with you next time you go for an early morning walk? Then the birds are all singing at once and you can tell me their names and what they're singing about. You know everything."

"What, I know it all? Hardly, but some of us know a little something as a beginning, the sum of which we will gladly share with you, say—to-morrow, Saturday, if the sun shines.

"Dear me—the esses I have used! They are called sibilant, that is, they have a hissing sound, and they

appear to be very useful among the ornithologists, at least when they quote bird-talk, so never mind. I suspect the bird's alphabet according to these gentlemen is limited to five letters, C, D, G, Z, and S, all but D being sibilant, but I notice whenever I whistle like a Hawk within earshot of young chickens they make a frantic dash for cover just as fast as their long legs will carry them; they never stop to argue with me about using too many sibilants, but take themselves off, precisely as we would if a roaring, man-eating lion appeared in the path before us! They understand that whistle perfectly without learning the sibilant alphabet beforehand."

The next day the sun did shine, and very early in the morning before it had cleared the spruces on the hilltop in the east, two eager hunters with field-glasses instead of guns in their hands were out after birds.

"Aha," remarked Parter, as they walked down a path which was still without a blade of green grass on its border, "I hear the dead leaves rustling under the bushes over there, and it would not be at all surprising if we found the Fox Sparrow had arrived. He is due about this time, or at least before the snow has quite disappeared. Yes, there he is, scratching for grubs and bugs hidden under the withered leaves, see them

**Fox  
Sparrow**

fly! I can count at least four other fellows with him; there they go, flipping their wings and jumping up with both legs, their sharp claws sending every leaf a-whirling. Their backs are a rusty, reddish brown, and their white breasts are flecked and barred with rusty red like the color called burnt sienna in my paint box"(Parter, of course was an artist), "their tails are also the same color, but a bit brighter. They are pretty much the same color as some of the leaves they scatter, and are much larger than other birds of their kind—the Sparrows, I mean,—they are very lively too. Indeed, the Fox Sparrow, as you can see, outdoes the old hen at scratching, for she uses one foot first and then the other, balancing as gracefully on either leg as the trained elephant in the circus; then she backs down to see what she can find. Not much I think, for she gives a silly peck or two at nothing in particular and starts scratching again; but the wise and foxy Sparrow has no time to spare so he goes in with both feet at once, rising with his wings between each dig at the leafy mold. You may be sure he finds something, for in no haphazard way he chooses a good spot to dig. When he has his fill he will sing. Yes, there he is now, up in the bush, stretching his neck and swelling his little throat with *'I thank you—it's late, but I'm telling my mate there's lots here to eat right under your feet, of breakfast there's*



FOX SPARROW





Swamp Sparrow

Song Sparrow



*plenty and your stomach's empty, so hustle and come, lazy Kate.*' Sometimes you will find this Sparrow perched comfortably in a tree singing softly to himself—I wonder what? Perhaps this: *'I'm a pretty good-looking young fellow, yes, I've scattered the brown leaves and yellow, and after each turn found a jolly fat worm which I ate before he could yell hello!'* No doubt this is the early bird that gets the worm, but the worm, how does *he* fare? Well, he goes down in the 'Bill of Fare' and that is the end of him.

"The Fox Sparrow is among the very earliest arrivals from the south and his stop with us is not very long, for by the middle or the end of April he has flown to his summer home in the far north and we will not see him again until the first or the middle of October when he is on his way south to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, perhaps, where he will spend the winter.

"Hark! from the shrubbery over yonder comes a sweet and lively melody more familiar to us than the mellow, liquid, swinging notes of the Fox Sparrow. You recognize it? Yes, you are right, one may always be sure no other dainty, winged musician can pipe his boxwood flute so well, and what is best about him is he pipes in every month of the year. That is our blessed

Song  
Sparrow

Song Sparrow, always cheerful, rain or shine, always singing morning, noon, and sometimes in the night, ever ready with his variations on 'Morning's ruddy beams tint the eastern sky,' or, 'For thou to northern lands again the glad and glorious sun doth bring,' or, 'When the glorious sun is set, when the grass with dew is wet.' True, he does not know a word of the rhymes, but the spirit of the music is all within him. He is the fellow, too, who can best sing, 'Behind the clouds the sun's still shining'; for I have often caught him singing in the rain! I suppose singing goes on all over the world by strange people in all sorts of strange places; for, you recollect, you sing yourself the music to Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The children sing in far Japan, the children sing in Spain, the organ with the organ man is singing in the rain.' You ought to love that Song Sparrow if only for the reason that he *can* sing in the rain; most people cannot. It was Charles Kingsley who wrote one rainy day in a little girl's album that he had no song in his heart to offer her; but he finally advised the little girl to do something which would result in something else that would last for all time, yet that something else he found he couldn't do himself for one short day; this is what he wrote:

" My fairest child I have no song to give you,  
 No lark could pipe to skies so dull and gray;

Yet, ere we part, one lesson I can leave you  
For every day.

“Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever;  
Do noble things, not dream them all day long,  
And so make life, death, and that vast forever  
One grand sweet song.

I think the Song Sparrow comes nearest to doing that very thing; there is a certain nobleness in being able to sing your way through life in all conditions of things and weather.

“Our Song Sparrow is a happy, spritely chap remarkably free from attacks of disease, possessing a staunch little frame which enables him to withstand the extremes of winter cold and summer heat. He often stays with us the year around, but if he flies southward he returns very early in the spring. His general coloring is like the brown leaves and nuts of October, and in the middle of his white-gray breast is a large dark brown spot to mark where his cheery heart beats.

“Perhaps this little singer has recently arrived from the south; there is no telling, but I can promise you he has been right here on this meadow with a nest in those bushes near the river for three spring seasons previous to this at the very least. I know his song, and have named him Don Juan because he sings a bit of melody in Mozart’s opera of that name—listen, there it is now! [See the first page of

music, bottom line, after the last chapter.] I dare say he will not start housekeeping with his little mate much before the middle of April; then the pair is likely to raise two families of little ones through the two following months or more, and we may reasonably expect to hear his cheerful song for all that time yet to come. Perhaps—who can tell—he sings to keep his mate in good spirits while she is brooding over the eggs, and later when they are hatched and the babies are chirping for food, he not only will help feed them but will sing them to sleep. Now, Boy Blue, some people would call all this ‘an effort of the imagination’ but you can be perfectly sure of two or three things if you take the time and trouble to find them out. First, the Song Sparrow is very likely to return each spring to the same old place and sing the same old song in the same old key according to the piano; second, he is sure to sing for the pure love of it and so comfort his mate and the little ones by thus proving he is quite near to protect them in time of need; and third, when, after the fifth season you do not hear the familiar song any more you can be dead certain the bird’s dead. At best his life does not extend beyond the fifth summer, and although his children will return and sing songs similar to his, you will never hear the father bird’s song again.

“I am sorry to say not all the March birds are such good songsters. Look down on the meadow, now, at that bunch of blackbirds, they are Bronze Grackles. Listen, they haven’t the remotest idea of what a song is!

**Bronze  
Grackle**

Notice their *walk*, there is something waggish about it, a sort of swagger, tail and all, suggesting that they are mighty proud of the steely blue color of their necks, the lustrous bronze reflections on their backs, or the polished jet black of their coat tails, I know not which. At any rate, they could not possibly be proud of their cracked voices, for they can sing no better than an old iron gate squeaking on rusty hinges, a ringing cart wheel, a noisy watchman’s rattle, or the jingling mainspring broken loose from a tumble-down kitchen clock! The remarks they make always remind me of just those grating, jangling sounds; you can take your choice of the comparisons and still find any one of them might beat the bird. You may always expect to find the Grackle promenading the grassy field or plowed ground with tail a-swing, it is his habit, he is seeking what he may devour. Toward evening he is beside the nest in some old pine tree, maybe, still squeaking and clucking about heaven only knows what! The Sparrows, on the other hand, are birds always singing in the bush—whenever they happen not to be on the

ground. They are provided with especially strong bills with which to peck in the gravel and crush the hard seeds they find, and when they are not in the road doing that they seem to be playing at hide and seek in the shrubbery. The Grackle, however, prefers industry to sport and for hours together explores the fallow field. He helps the farmer harrow the ground—which is a far more harrowing operation for the cutworm—and carefully inspects the lawn with an eye eager for any left-overs resulting from Mr. Robin's carelessness. I am told he kills the English Sparrows, sometimes, and must admit I am not altogether sorry for that; but the rascally fellow on other occasions runs amuck with our song birds, wrecks their nests, smashes their eggs, and does enough damage for his photograph to deserve a prominent place in the 'Rogue's Gallery.' Dear me! that tremendously sharp-pointed bill of his is capable of doing some fearful execution. He is another bird that stays on through the winter though not very often.

"Now, if your ears are keen, Boy Blue, you will catch in the distance the soft notes of a bird whose feathers are bluer, even, than your eyes.

### **Bluebird**

'*Sur-e-ty, pur-i-ty, blue-bird-y*' he sings, and sure enough he is—as blue as the skies through which he flies, brighter than the cerulean blue of





Bluebird  
(above)

Robin  
(below)



Flicker

Parter's paint-box, purer in hue than the Gentian the poet Bryant sang about which he insisted was 'Blue—blue—as if that sky let fall a flower from its cerulean wall.' That's the Bluebird, with the blue of the sky on his back and the rusty brown of the earth on his breast—emblem of happiness, so he is called, though I cannot see any reason why he should monopolize a character which is also common in many another bird. Now if one says he feels blue we certainly understand he is not in a particularly happy state of mind, but if he said he felt Bluebirdy we never would suspect he was happy but might think he was silly, and then again if he said he felt like a 'blooming Jay' we would be quite sure he meant that he had made a fool of himself sometime or other! So much for feeling like a bird or a color, it seems far more natural to feel like yourself. Mr. Burroughs thinks the Bluebird sings mostly about *purity*, but I have an idea he whistles to keep himself company, expressing his opinion of the weather and other matters; the end of March is a bit dreary so he sings, *'Very cold, chilly wind, brook too bold, ears dinned, noisy chatter over stones, what's the matter? sticks and bones out our door! Cleaning house, what a bore, some old mouse built his nest on our floor—I'd better fly over there and help.'*

"Yes, the Bluebirds are really setting up house-

keeping again in the old apple tree and it is very amusing to see the threatening beak of Mrs. Bluebird appear in the doorway if he attempts to enter. Ungrateful creature, she spurns his help; what man was ever any good at house cleaning?

“Ha! there comes a Flicker to see what is going on; he is inspecting the walls of the house and now drums a rattling summons at the door.

### **Flicker**

Betsy Bluebird's face suddenly appears again. ‘*What d’you want?*’ There is nothing in the voice that remotely suggests *purity* now, and the bill! it certainly has a very ugly look even if I did say the other day it was an awkward thing with which to express one's feelings. When a gaping bill threatens blows it is just as well to keep one's fingers out of reach. Mr. Flicker knows as much as that too, and being a peaceable bird he has already found it convenient to inspect the other side of the tree, moreover he attends strictly to the business of grub hunting on all occasions and will waste no time now making explanations at somebody's front door; if he did, being a bird with some humor, I should think he might say, ‘*I rapped for Sappy Grub and not for Horny Bill.*’ If he is indeed without humor in his disposition then tell me how to account for his many whimsical names; High-hole, Wake-up, Yarrup, Yucker, Hittock, Woodwall, Flicker, Piut, Clape,

Golden-winged Woodpecker, Yellow Hammer, Yellow Jay, Pigeon Woodpecker, and Harry Wicket. He is one of the handsomest of the Woodpeckers. Besides the cardinal red band on the back of his neck, the long black feathers of his wings are edged with gold, between his neck and his breast is a black crescent, and a small black wedge extends from the bill backward. The lower part of the back is marked with a broad patch of white, the breast is dull gray-white uniformly spotted with black, and the black, sharp-pointed tail feathers are lined with yellow; indeed, yellow is one of this Woodpecker's distinguishing marks. Now he is either calling loudly for his mate or attempting to tell the whole world that it is going to rain to-morrow, what a noise! it is almost equal to that of a cackling hen. '*Wet-wet-wet-wet-wet-wet-wet-wet-wet-wet.*' It does not make any difference how you interpret such a half-whistled cackle, it is just plain racket, that is all, and there is no room left in the air for the carol of the Bluebird or the Robin. I imagine those tuneful birds would relish being able to yell back '*Dry up! wet spells always end and so does the weather. But you—like Tennyson's brook you go on forever.*' The Flicker is at home everywhere, in town and out, on the telephone pole and in the apple tree, in orchard and grove, on the lawn and in the pasture, on the fence

and in the open field, wherever you go, in spring, summer, autumn, or winter—often he stays the year around—some day you are sure to see busily absorbed in ‘grubbing’ a tall and slim bird who will occasionally stop long enough to shout at the top of his lungs an ear-splitting monosyllable. Never mind what he says, it really does not matter, but you will notice he makes such a clatter that most of the birds keep quiet until he gets through with his hysterical outbreak. That’s the Flicker! He shouts in a rasping tone that reminds one of an ungreased cart wheel—‘*Quee-er.*’ Probably he did not happen to find any grubs in the last tree he explored. Presently he beholds what may prove to be an invitingly resonant telegraph pole. ‘Now,’ he chuckles softly, ‘here is my drum and a chance to wake up the whole countryside.’ So he travels round and round that pole trying to find exactly the spot which will make the most noise, there! *Brrrr-r-r-r-r—r—r—r—r!* He has found it. Beat that if you can! He must be doing something continually; if it is not hunting the grub at least it can be making a noise. What for? Well, there is the answer on the telegraph pole in the shape of another Flicker without a red cravat on the back of its neck. It is no doubt his mate, she has answered the drum call. It is not very often you see this mating business of the Flicker in opera-



tion much before the middle of April; then you can never tell what he will press into service for a drum. It may be the hard and hollow shell of a decayed branch in the old apple tree, or perhaps the old abandoned rusty milk pan in the barnyard; anything will do if it makes enough noise, and, you see, it is all for the love of the lady, she understands and she comes. When the birds start housekeeping they begin at once like carpenters with hammer and chisel to cut their way into the sheltering trunk of an old tree. After chipping an opening about two and a half inches wide they chisel in a downward direction from ten to twenty inches farther; the hole is then enlarged at the bottom, and finally Mrs. Flicker lays upon the chippings five to eight white eggs about an inch long.

"Very likely the odd names given to the Flicker are in large part due to his strange notes and funny behavior in the mating season and, I must admit, at other times as well, so we cannot say that he only loses his head 'a-courting.' He has a strange way of stretching his neck, bobbing his head up and down, bowing, scraping, and spreading wings and tail until you think he is trying to imitate someone dancing the Virginia Reel or has gone clean daft, or, to use a regular boy's expression has developed 'bats in his belfry!' I might add that he acts as crazy as a loon

except for the reason that a loon never seems as crazy as he."

Just at this point the Flicker flew into a tree directly ahead of Boy Blue and, apparently catching sight of him, bobbed his head excitedly up and down, this he followed with rapid remarks in a squeaky cracked voice which sounded like *Meet-chew, meet-chew, meet-chew*. "There," exclaimed Parter, "that bird is a north New Englander, he is trying to say 'Happy to meet you.'" Boy Blue chuckled and threw a pebble so deftly that it struck the tree about a foot from where the bird was perched, at the same instant came a blast from a tin horn—that was from the house and meant breakfast. But to the Flicker the pebble and horn spelled danger so he took to his wings; as for Parter he only heeded the horn and with Boy Blue sped his heels homeward, quoting Sir Walter Scott<sup>1</sup> as he went, altered to suit his own fancy:

"There! There is Janie Vickers.

One blast upon her breakfast horn  
Were worth a thousand Flickers."

Now Janie Vickers was the cook who had had her instructions about that horn!

<sup>1</sup> *The Lady of the Lake*, Canto V., verse XVIII.

## CHAPTER II

### MARCH

SEVERAL days elapsed before another morning hunt for birds was attempted, for Parter argued as Emerson's squirrel did that "all sorts of things and weather must be taken in together" to make such an outing successful, that birds could not be seen well on a "gray day," that they had all they could do to hold a footing in the tree, keep the feathers on their backs, and their tails in balance on a windy one, that on cold days they are in hiding, and on rainy ones, well — It's wet and the wind is never weary, nor ever a song for a day so dreary. But the boy thought Parter overparticular and that was, very naturally, a discouragingly inconvenient complaint with which boys are seldom afflicted.

"Now Parter, you forget what was on that valentine you sent me not much more than a month ago, and I don't need to alter the verse to fit any kind of a poor day:

"Then come the wild weather come sleet or come snow  
We will stand by each other however it blow."

"O bless me, why was I so rash; I meant that verse not for ourselves but for the two boosy, maple-soaked Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers I drew, but I'll alter that valentine at once:

"Then come the mild weather to-morrow I'll go  
And 'blow' thee to every small bird that I know!"

And Boy Blue giggled. "That's the worst yet, Parter, it's what you call slovenly slang."

"It is! Well, Longfellow says 'however it blow,' the whaler says, on spying a whale, 'There she blows,' Shakespeare says, 'the wild thyme blows,' Hood says I've met with many a breeze before but never such a blow,' Tennyson says, 'Blow, bugle, blow,' Dryden sings, 'And, dying, bless the hand that gave the blow,' so why shouldn't I blow a bird in rhyme—you must allow me a little of what is called poetic liberty, specially when all the world is blown one way or another in March!"

At last a sunny morning dawned and Robert Louis Stevenson's own "Birdy with a yellow bill" hopped  
**Starling** upon Boy Blue's window sill—it was  
none other than the English Starling—but he could not truthfully sing "Ain't you 'shamed you sleepy-head" for Boy Blue was already up and dressed, and a few minutes later in company with his grandfather was greeting the Starling on the cold

gray lawn broadly spotted with pale green here and there.

“You know that bird so well,” said Parter, “I need not tell you his characteristic yellow bill separates him from all the other blackbirds completely; you could never question who you saw if you saw that. His feathers, too, are tipped or spangled with buff or gray-white which is another point of marked distinction; no other blackbird has those spots. You notice he walks as all of his tribe do and never hops or runs like the Robin. I suppose his forefathers like some of ours came from England, we could not be sure, we only know some of them were landed in 1890 in New York by a Mr. Schieffelin who liberated them in Central Park, the playground of my boyhood days, where only the Red-winged Blackbird and the Song Sparrow were familiar—at least to me. Now, this Starling is proceeding to make himself at home almost anywhere. He has flown up the Hudson as far as Newburgh, we saw him ourselves in South Orange two years ago, he has flown eastward as far as Boston and its vicinity, and southward to Princeton, and Philadelphia; indeed I do not know where he will appear next, he is certainly on the move after food. He partakes of the winter lunches you spread for birds on your window sill, apparently likes the berries of the Virginia Creeper

which trails over the piazza, digs in the ground for cut-worms, June-bugs, and grubs, hunts the grasshopper and the cricket, and unfortunately helps himself to currants, berries, cherries, and other small fruits. But I think he does more good than harm, so we will let him stay. He is a chatterer rather than a musician, and does all the strange things in squeaks and guttural raspings that the Grackle indulges in. But if he attempts to whistle as the singing bird does he fails after the first two or three clear notes and lapses into a sort of jingling jargon. Starlings have a habit of collecting together in large flocks especially in the fall when they are possessed with a spirit of unrest and a desire to migrate. None of them seems to know exactly where to go, but if it is in the vague somewhere beyond, that is sufficient. I have never heard that they have made any attempt yet to follow the other birds to the far south. Mr. Hudson, the English naturalist says they are not constant in their attachment to a locality. They are wandering in habit and shift their ground. In a certain district where they are abundant it is their custom at close of day to gather from all directions and fly to the roosting place, then the 'cloud of starlings' may be seen at its best and it is one of the finest sights that bird life presents in England. At intervals the flock rises, and from a distance it may be easily mistaken



for a long black cloud hanging over the wood; suddenly it grows thin as the flock scatters until it almost fades away. Again it darkens the sky and by-and-by empties itself into the trees. 'This is repeated several times until as evening draws on the birds finally settle down to their places, but not to sleep, for the wood is filled with the jangle of ten thousand penetrating voices all whistling chattering, scolding, and singing together.' I am repeating as nearly as I can remember what two English authors have written of the bird and am thinking of King's Chapel Burial ground in Boston about five in the afternoon where several thousand English or House Sparrows get together and raise a din equal to as many small and deafening sleigh-bells all jingling at once. What the meaning of such a clatter is one can only guess, but I suppose it could be translated into two plain English words—good-night. Starlings and House Sparrows singing vespers. The Starling nests in a hole in a tree, or a cliff, and when these are not convenient he will take possession of the house you build for the Bluebird, so look out! He does not mind if he crowds out Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, Purple Martins, and Wrens. If you make the doorways of the smaller birds' houses as small as the proper tenants require he cannot get in. He is

**English  
Sparrow**

rather a noisy chap, too, and therefore not a desirable near neighbor.

“Now what do we hear in the budding birches ahead of us? Yes, that’s the Blue Jay, more than the equal of two Starlings in noise, fuss, and feathers. We sometimes call him a blooming Jay, and he is blooming; no flowers of spring are quite so gay. Blue is an insufficient title for him. See how bright he appears in the sunshine; the simple word blue does not fit those lustrous colors at all. His wings alone display, besides the white bars, four distinctly different hues, turquoise, cerulean, cadet, and ultramarine blue all graded one into another yet quite separated by bars of black. The tail is like the wings, but the back is entirely different, a soft metallic lilac; the crest, or ‘top-knot,’ is a sheeny lilac-blue, the neck is white-gray bordered all about with black, and the breast is a warm, light quaker drab. What a showy fellow he is!

“If Cowper could see him he might exclaim in his own verse,

“Artist, attend! your brushes and your paint—  
Produce no saint, but Jay in colors quaint.

“He would be difficult to picture in paint; the colors are shifty in the morning’s sunbeams as you may easily discover with the aid of your field-glass. And



Blue Jay



the bird's voice, what of that? Well, least said is soonest mended; it is squally. A screaming Blue Jay always foretokens trouble of some kind—perhaps a bird fight. He may not be doing anything serious at this time of year, but later on in the nesting season when you hear that squawking *Ja-a-a-ay, Ja-a-a-ay* accompanied by a flash of blue wings and see three or four of the bright-colored creatures flying about very excitedly you may be sure they are up to mischief and a once happy bird home is being wrecked. There is a bell-like ring to some of his notes, not all of them are screaming *ja-a-ays*, and we will give him the credit of having a little music in his make-up, though he seems a great deal like the clown in the circus, a noisy fellow bragging about his own beauty and importance and a rascal into the bargain! Sometimes his voice reminds one of the bagpipe whistle of a toy balloon, and again of a shrill squeaking cart wheel. If this is near the truth—and I think it is—we shall not give him a front seat in the bird's orchestra; his place would properly be among the cymbals and bagpipes. Everybody pokes fun at the bird and when a man appears ridiculous they call him a "blooming Jay," probably that is where the clown of the circus comes in; he makes fun-poking a specialty!

"I am quite sure Mr. Blue Jay has stayed with us

through the winter, for when the snow is on the ground his note is one of the commonest of bird calls; but many of his tribe do travel southward in September and October and undoubtedly find a winter's sojourn in Florida or the other States which border the Gulf of Mexico as pleasant as some of the wealthy people of the North do. I have more than once witnessed a 'scrap' between the Robin and the Blue Jay, but always the Robin seems to be quite able to take care of himself and what belongs to him. Little brown wings may flee at the menacing approach of the big blue ones, but Robin stays ready to meet the visitor with something more at the point of his bill than sarcastic greetings. Still, a humorous rhymester has truthfully sung,

“With twigs and strings and other things  
The Robin builded it strong,  
And as he plaited them into shape  
He caroled a cheerful song.

“‘Why so busy?’ the Jay Bird asked.  
‘What are you doing pray?’  
‘I suppose,’ said the Robin, ‘I’m building a nest  
For you—you blooming Jay!’

“But I would be quite ready to stake my last penny  
that the Jay will never get that nest!”

“Parter,” thoughtfully remarked the boy during



the momentary pause of his grandfather's talk, "you say the Blue Jay, Song Sparrow, Grackle, Flicker, and Robin often stay through the winter; why do some stay and others go? What do birds migrate for anyway, why don't they stay where they belong?"

"It is pretty difficult to say *where* any bird belongs, but the rest of your questioning is easily answered; for instance, there are your ancestors; nobody can boast of having been very intimate with his ancestors and you cannot very easily question them about their private affairs, so as a rule, unless they have left papers, documents, and letters behind on leaving this world we have to guess why they happened to do certain things we know they did do. If they could answer questions, one of the first things you would ask, I think, is this: 'Now old ancestor, what did you come to America for, why didn't you stay in Europe where you belonged?' and the reply would probably be, 'Thou't a bold and prying lad, but 'twas liberty and food a-plenty that brought me here.' This answers your question about the migration of the bird, he is always on the lookout for more food and freer living, his horizon is wide, and with wings which enable him to get about with a speed greater than that of an express train why should he not fly into the undiscovered country where there must be bugs

and worms galore! You scarcely understand the immense advantage of having wings; you can glide through the air big distances with little or no effort, and surely their possession must account for the fact that a bird is never contented to stay where he belongs. He is great on exploration, and I strongly suspect dies on the wing instead of—to use the expression figuratively—in bed. What is uppermost in a bird's mind a great deal of the time is, food, food! and plenty of it. The snow falls and buries everything—shrubby, berries, winter buds, seeds, and seed vessels, nuts, grain, shriveled fruit and all; even the brown earth is completely covered with a thick white blanket which the longest of bills may never penetrate. To the bird it is like shutting the pantry door, locking it, putting the key in your pocket, walking away and leaving him to starve. No doubt the bird argues in his own mind, 'this is no place for me,' so he spreads his wings and flies toward the sun in the far south where grouchy old Winter never comes to spread his snow white linen directly over all the good things on one's dining table! That is the reason the northern bird migrates and why, in a very cold season, strange and beautifully colored Crossbills and Grosbeaks suddenly appear in flocks in the more southernly country where they do not belong. Again, your own Robin and Blue Jay are

bright and shrewd fellows who know that food in certain places is not difficult to obtain in winter and who, not being afraid of moderate cold or snow, take their chances with the weather and also remain where they do not belong—at least in the winter time. But by far the greater number of Robins, Jays, and Song Sparrows fly southward going as one might say 'with the crowd' for they are creatures of habit and having satisfactorily done a thing once they will attempt it again, besides, the children will follow their parents, you know. We say 'birds of a feather flock together' they do, especially in the fall when that season starts in with its rapid changes, then the various kinds of birds gather in their own companies and decide among themselves to 'move on' which they do, sometimes, in immense flocks.

"There is one very distinct difference between your ancestors and those of the bird. Your forefathers handed down to your parents and yourself what are called traditions, that is, certain practices, customs, opinions, or ideas. These passed on from one generation to another usually by word of mouth. But the bird's ancestors having no kind of a mouth for words had to let the traditions take care of themselves; and they certainly did, for every bird is what you would call a 'copy-cat.' He follows exactly the customs of his forefathers, and deviates by not the

breadth of a hair. He builds—or she does—the same kind of a nest of the same materials, in the old way and in the same kind of a place. There is not a single bird in the world with brains enough to invent a new kind of waterproof nest and get out a patent on it! All of them inherit the ‘one track’ mind of their ancestors and migrate precisely as they did thousands of years before.

“The spring migration is the most interesting to us, for, when the winter’s snows are gone and the bare earth appears under the strong sunshine, when the rushing brook hurries along to join the overflowing river, and the violets begin to open their blue eyes there is a joyful promise in the *Cheerily, cheerily, cheer up* of the Robin in the bare maple tree and we know that he is telling us he expects all his relatives and friends from the South in the next few weeks.

“What a rapid and wonderful processional it is of birds all a-wing, a noiseless one too; it comes in the silence of the night or in the joy of the morning and then breaks forth into song! The bevvies of birds might well sing along with Hannah Gould’s *Frost-Spirit*,

“We will not go on like that blustering train,  
The wind and the snow, the hail and the rain,  
That make such a bustle and noise in vain,  
But we’ll be as busy as they.

“As the days glide on and grow warmer the flight from the South grows stronger. On they come, the different kinds of birds, whether by day or night they know their own pathways through the trackless skies and also have a very definite idea of the points where they will stop as their journey proceeds. Large numbers of the so-called Warblers pass through the mountain gap at Chattanooga; you shall have their names later on when they arrive here in May. Many species travel near the coast and some individuals are blown out to sea by driving storms; still others follow the river valley that extends from south to north—that of the Mississippi, the Missouri, Chattanooga, Ohio, Alleghany, Susquehanna, Delaware, Hudson, Connecticut, Merrimac, and Penobscot. These are all landmarks—or watermarks, as you please—which the birds delight to trace to their source for they promise food in abundance and lead to the hills and lovely nesting retreats where the heat is not so unbroken and exhausting as it is in the tropics from whence they have flown; many of them you must remember have come from South America.”

“That seems an awful distance to fly, Parter, day after day, and I should think by the time they got here they would be all in—completely winded, I mean, particularly as you say they fly rapidly. How fast can they fly?”

"I think I can tell you"; and Parter fumbled in his pocket for the familiar note-book which was filled with no end of bird music, and dates, and doings, all jotted down carefully with a tireless pencil; indeed, besides the numberless little sketches of birds, flowers, mountains, and other things it contained, it was a sort of history of every day, with notes on the clouds, thunderstorms, and summer heat; there were temperature diagrams and house plans, memoranda of the times of arrival and departure of trains, of dollars and cents spent for everything under the sun, of what somebody said, of rainy and drouthy days—all hopelessly mixed. In fact, to Boy Blue's eyes it appeared like a tropical jungle of penciled thoughts through which you could never find your way. But Parter was not a bit discouraged, he turned a few pages and reeled off some notes which seemed so familiar to him that the place in the book where they were apparently did not matter!

"Here we go, Mr. Swallow wings it at the rate of 2 miles 2844 feet in one minute! Mr. Jim Crow, 2 miles 260 feet, the Eider Duck, 1 mile 3731 feet, the Frigate Bird, which is said to have a greater spread of wing in proportion to his weight than any other bird, flies 1 mile 3463 feet; some say his swiftness is unsurpassed, but I am giving you the results of actual scientific tests taken a matter of ten years ago



according to my memorandum, and I cannot say what has been discovered since then. The Duck Hawk's record is 1 mile 1350 feet, the Falcon flies 1 mile 1057, Bald Eagle, 4721.8 feet, Carrier Pigeon, 4184 feet, Wild Duck, 3960 feet, Wild Goose, 3696 feet, and finally the Ostrich with his long and powerful legs aided by his wings, the fleetest of all running creatures, beats nearly everything in sight with a record of 1 mile 4557 feet. Birds are queer little creatures with advantages remarkably superior to some we possess, yet they are very stupid at times from our point of view. If we turn to their ancestors again we learn this. In far away Europe the birds of to-day are still crossing the Mediterranean Sea on a strangely irregular, round-about course because their ancestors followed that track when the formation of land and water in very ancient times was altogether different; but the descendants do not change their route for an easier one, they continue in the tracks of their fathers, the leaders, and they play the old game of Follow my Leader—it is a favorite one with all animals, you know—so just there the stupidity is undeniable, and I am convinced birds never save their wings any more than thoughtless people their legs. Onward the birds come, very often unchecked by the weather; they never seem to understand by experience that it is a very unreliable thing to depend

upon, or heed Mark Twain's warning that they may have to face every variety of it in New England within twenty-four hours! Consequently there is always a chance that thousands may die in unseasonable, pitiless storms. Not so very many years ago, in early spring untold numbers of Hermit Thrushes perished in a violent blizzard which swept over New England just after the birds had arrived. But fortunately a disaster like that is of rare occurrence. Most spring seasons are sunny and warm enough for the birds to build their nests, start housekeeping, lay their eggs and rear their young with as little discomfort and risk as we might experience in a passing shower on a summer's day. This is the rule all over the land, from one end of it to the other, and no doubt if the birds find plenty to eat life goes as merrily and carelessly as the County Fair. Even so early as March there is enough food for all though little of it is within sight of our eyes, maple buds are very acceptable to many birds, there are still some seeds left scattered over the ground which up to this time were buried under the snow drifts, and farther north, from Maine westward, there is a generous share remaining of withered wild fruits, whose seeds the birds belonging to the Finch Family prize, northern and southern alike. But the grubs and the bugs we do not easily see are the great attraction and there

are millions and millions of them in hiding, all our deadly enemies, which will be quickly routed out and devoured upon the arrival of the little winged benefactors. Speaking of food reminds me that we have made our early morning circuit and breakfast awaits two early birds without worms or wings. Suppose we go in, Boy Blue, for those fresh eggs laid by the friendly hen and let her have the two worms which the old proverb says we are entitled to." And they did, but Parter never said afterward who did get those particular worms; that, no doubt, was one thing he did not know!

## CHAPTER III

### APRIL

AT last fickle April came with its usual showers and sunshine, but in New England with other most unseasonable companions—icy frost, torrid heat, scurrying snowflake, thunder-clap, and March wind with all the other winds of the compass; each of these unwelcome weather waifs took possession of one or two days and left all the rest to the mercy of the east wind. Parter called these gray days, and they got on his nerves to such an extent that he threw out a few hints for Boy Blue to climb the church steeple, nail the weathercock east, and so save a great many stiff necks resulting from the effort to catch the cock o'dawn crowing in some different direction.

“But Parter,” objected the boy, “I thought you said roosters always crowed at the rising of the sun?”

“I should take off my hat to you, Boy Blue, I forgot that, and acknowledge myself outwitted,” replied Parter, “but we will trust this obstinate gilt bird may change his mind and crow at high noon to-day. So let us venture forth and look for more

interesting birds of a feather. They will soon become very busy with nest-architecture and we would do well to watch the proceedings.

“There’s the Chickadee in the orchard; she is looking over the old premises in the apple tree which she occupied a year ago. She is thinking of house-keeping, yet it is too early for her to begin, for the usual time is from the end of April to the twentieth of May. But she is turning the matter over in her mind.

“Birds are queer creatures—I mean in the direction of thinking; you never can tell how much of it they do. They get the nesting habit very early, and do not seem to know exactly what they are about. You may find, any time now, a crack-brained young bird with a wad of plant down or a straw in its bill about to ‘consider’ as the cow in the nursery rhyme was bidden to do. ‘Let’s see,’ she says, ‘what did I get this straw for? A sub-sill or a rafter? How about that? No—no, it’s a nest, not a house I’m to build, but I really don’t know what for. Building a nest is something like circular insanity; you go round, and round, and round till your tail curves, your head spins, and the whole blooming orchard is swinging all hands ’round! Then the sticks, straws, moss, hairs, and strings and things get in the dance, twist together in a circle, and you find your-

self in uttermost confusion trying to straighten things out which won't straighten; but if you settle down for a moment so you can think straight, everything fits about you as snug as a bug in a rug. So I s'pose it's all right any way you look at it, though I haven't an idea what I've been about. Building is certainly not in my line; worms are far more to my taste. There are those gumps of Phœbes; every year they try to build three nests at once under the studio eaves I'm not so foolish as that! They begin one beside the first rafter, then another beside the next rafter, and the next—and so on! The idiots! They work like beavers, and use mud, not straws. A bill of mud a minute equals sixty in an hour, or seven hundred and twenty in a day of twelve hours, which for two birds means one thousand four hundred and forty billfuls a day, or four thousand three hundred and twenty in three days. Net result, one whole nest, one half-built nest, one quarter-built nest! Good lack! she hath no brains—hath Phœbe; and her mate, he hath a head of bone! But why stand I here with straw in bill? What for indeed? At least it shows which way the wind blows, and that is east; I have an idea it also points to nest-building which I do not yet care for; I'll drop it and go after that flying bug—there! she is gone.'

"That is the way, I imagine, the birdling thinks.



This youthful Sparrow, out there on the railing cocked her head this way and that, watched from out the tail of her eye Mrs. Phoebe's mysterious inspection of the old quarters,

**Phœbe**

and was a bit confused between that proceeding and the instinctive idea of nest-building lodged within her own brain. In about ten days more we will see the whole operation of building going on by the Phœbes, mud, sticks, straws, and all, with momentary pauses for a bug lunch, no suspension on account of strikes, and no disagreements between employers and employed. Although Phœbe is said to prefer the under timbers of a bridge as a foundation on which to build, and no doubt selects a spot near the water because of the convenience of mud, nevertheless the pair which builds year after year under the eaves of Parter's studio, does so knowing very well there is no mud nearer than that by the spring fully two hundred feet away. Nor do the birds object to my being so very near. They come about the first of April, and begin to build on or near the twentieth; there is nothing very regular about the time, but I always associate the song *Phæ-be, Ve-bliebt*, with the sound of rushing brooks, spring freshets, and April skies. It means in the space of only a few days winter will be downed, for spring will get the best of him.

"Then the tireless birds begin transporting the mud and other things until we have before our eyes the evidence of Phoebe's muddled brain in two incompleting nests, and one bulky affair plastered and woven with mud, dead leaves, rootlets, mosses, grasses, and hairs done to a finish! Alas for Phoebe! she is a shiftless housekeeper and when she gets out with the family Parter has to remove the mansion of clay—it swarms with tiny bugs, which the polite ornithologist calls parasites. If she raises another family, as sometimes she does, she must find another Real Estate agent!

"Suppose we go out now and interview the Chickadees, which just at this season are flourishing on what we may well call the 'Insect enemy.'

**Black-capped**

**Chickadee**

These birds inspect the bark of trees for Coddling Moth eggs, larva, and worm (which destroy our apples), and spiders' eggs, tent caterpillar eggs, plant lice, Fall Canker-worm eggs (found on our elms), moths, caterpillars, and beetles in general. These are the dainties of his table, winter and summer. He is fond of any food of an animal nature especially if it contains fat. Hence, when you spread your window-sill lunch counter for birds you will quickly discover a beef bone, a lump of suet, hemp seed, and any kind of chopped-up nuts are quite to his liking.



Phoebe



Chickadees

"The lively little fellows chattering *Sic-a-dee-dee-dee-dee* are on the hunt now for insect eggs hidden in the trees. The examination of the stomach of a Chickadee has revealed that the little bird had dined on not less than two hundred and eighty Cankerworm eggs. Now just imagine yourself sitting at your dining-table three times a day and finishing at each meal a matter of ninety boiled eggs, shells and all! That is not what one may call a restricted diet for a growing boy, but it is a very ordinary one for a bird; then too, it is a great thing for the leafy tree which escapes furnishing a diet for worms. These Chickadees here have found my bits of wired suet hung in the apple trees and they come regularly for the food, performing all kinds of acrobatic stunts in the endeavor to get at it; they also do me a great service by clearing the bark of insect eggs and so forth. It was my little game to entice them to the apple trees for that purpose.

"Our Black-capped Chickadee is the common type in this part of the country, but there is another northern species in our mountains, one which comes down here to visit us in the winter, a brown-capped little fellow called the Acadian Chickadee; we may have the good fortune to meet him some day in the White Mountains where he stays all the year, but he is unlikely to pass this way except in the fall and



spring migrations. The Chickadees generally travel about in groups of from eight to twenty individuals always with a great deal of chatter and babble, and commonly with one or two White-breasted Nuthatches for company; these add their penny trumpet *Yank, yank, yank*, to the confusion of *dee-ee-ee-ees*, until we have enough to make several respectable Yankees! No doubt they do quite a bit of house-cleaning for the trees on trunk and limb. There's

**White-  
breasted  
Nuthatch**

the White-breasted Nuthatch now, in black cap and blue-gray cape. Point your field-glass at his slate-colored bill, notice the length and perkiness of it; what a fine pair of tweezers it makes for yanking the miserable grub out of hiding. He is very busy with it at present, probing every inch of that bark and no living atom of life hidden under it will escape. He is never weary of well-doing, but circles about the trunk, this way and that, in and out, now right side up and again upside down, inquisitive to the last degree. At times he will allow you to approach very near and observe his movements; he is so completely occupied with his task that you are beneath his notice yet he is always dropping a few remarks about something, it is hard to tell what: *'Lank-lank, lank-hank, yank-um-out! I do thorough work creeping about. Less'n five minute's time—twenty bugs, worth a dime!'*





White-breasted Nuthatch



**Bob-white**

He gets up with the sun and goes to work like the horny-billed son of toil that he is. He works not like man grudgingly for eight hours, but grubbingly for every hour that commands daylight. Yet Mr. Mearns insists that he indulges in a morning nap—let him! Any fellow who goes to work at break of day and never goes 'on strike' deserves 'forty winks' for his nictitating eyelid! When he does strike he hits the worm on the head—that settles the worm, and the bird might be properly labeled a public benefactor. I have never heard of his having done any damage to fruit or grain or crop of any kind.

"What whistle is that arising from the meadow border? Do you recognize the note—I should properly say three notes?"

"Yes, that's mother's whistle for me," quickly responded Boy Blue, "but this time it's the real thing. Am I right? Isn't it Bob-white? **Bob-white** I have never heard his call before."

"You are correct; it is he. I'll answer him," said Parter, and he whistled. "There, how quickly he responded; he thinks I'm another bird, but I gave back his whistle tone for tone, so why shouldn't he? His song is made up of three notes, the first one with a sudden bounce, then a jump from that to the last high note. At times the bird bounces twice on the first note; then we might say he whistles *I'm Bob-*

*white.* There are several Quail down there, you can make them out with your glasses, though like some other fellows we have met to-day their coats are so similar in color to their surroundings they are nearly invisible. They have been in this vicinity all winter, but keep themselves in close hiding mostly among the evergreen trees. They are wary of enemies such as the fox, the owl, and the man with a gun. As a rule they stick pretty close to the margin of the wood, fly low, and make themselves as inconspicuous as possible among the withered leaves on the ground. At night they sleep bunched together in a circle heads out; if an enemy springs among them there's a sudden, bursting whirl of wings, and they are gone—all except the one which unhappily may be caught. Their coloring, a mixture of gray, brown, ocherous yellow, black and white beautifully patterned, is decidedly protective; it would be difficult for you to distinguish them among the yellow and brown leaves of the autumn season. They are not rugged birds, and therefore fail to increase in the severe climate north of Albany and Boston where the winter is often violently cold. They lack the instinct or understanding to burrow under the snow as the Partridge does to keep warm during the fearfully cold nights.

“Our Partridge is a bird of different character; he was born and reared in a snowy clime. He is a

larger, heavier bird protected in winter by a close mat of feathers, and is furnished, at that season of the year, with snowshoes. As soon as the cold weather comes a fringe of horny points is

### Partridge

developed on the sides of the toes which greatly assists the bird in walking over the surface of the snow. He is not migrating in habit, so he is with us the year around; at the same time he has the idea strangely enough tucked away in his brain that he must get up and out somewhere when the season changes. All at once he is subject to a fit of restlessness and of wishing to do something very unusual 'in the line of flying.' This shows very plainly that his ancestors originally were migrating birds. But after a good deal of whirling about over the pastures and through the wood, he finally comes to his senses and settles down for the winter. As he lives upon bugs, berries, seeds, catkins, leaves and buds, such a diverse bill of fare scarcely requires what one might call a change of base, consequently he 'stays where he belongs'—if I may be permitted to use your own expression. Bugs in summer, berries in autumn, seeds in winter, and catkins in spring—what more would you ask? When winter comes and the snow is very deep, it is his habit to burrow into a drift and spend the night there as the Eskimo does in his ice hut. If the weather is mild he will roost in the boughs of the hemlock or the spruce.

"In the springtime his drumming for his mate is a most remarkable kind of a performance. He stands nearly upright upon a log, or something else which may elevate him above the forest floor, suddenly stretches himself to his full height, erect and stiff, with tail braced upon the log, and then beats the air with his opened wings, first slowly and then so furiously that you cannot clearly see either wings or body of the bird—they are simply a blur of feathers! *Thrump, thrump, thrump-ump-ump-pr-r-r-rrrrr*. The thumping sounds begin something like carpet-beating in spring, or the kettledrums which introduce the opening chorus in Gilbert and Sullivan's opera, *Pinafore*. The muffled tones are produced entirely by the concussion of air between the wings, and not by these striking the body. Certainly the Partridge must be the kettledrum of Nature's orchestra.

"We are drawing near the swamp which borders the road, and now hear the Red-winged Blackbird, as Emerson says, 'fluting his O-ka-lee-e-e-e.' He likes watery surroundings, and William Hamilton Gibson suggests that there is a 'wet ooze' to the song—he is right, and he translates it *Gloo-gl-eeeeee*. Probably the water has got in his windpipe! Now my idea is, that he sings of Oo-long-tea-eee; but you may listen and decide on that point yourself. There he is



as black as ever in his jet uniform with shoulder straps of scarlet and buff; how bright the colors are and how near he seems viewed through the glass! Only the last syllable of his song is distinct at a distance, the *Oolong* start of it is not so clear, I must admit. But how absurdly clumsy he appears trying to balance himself on that thin slip of an alder. Not more gracefully does he flap about on the swinging cat-tail over the water, but he is used to it and never gets a ducking. I think he is calling the other birds to a social tea this afternoon. To be sure he has arrived early on the ground with his fellows and it will be fully two weeks before his rusty-feathered mate will join him, so I am unable to explain why he should be gurgling about afternoon teas and no wife at hand to do the pouring! But possibly he may be singing for his own amusement, for it is certain the listening ear to which he would like to sing is not near at the present time. Of one thing I am sure the little bird sings first and last because he loves his own music.

"A month later—or less possibly—there will be another reason for the song. Down among the cat-tails and scarcely ten inches above the water you would find a nest; safe in its hollow you might see three or four spotted, pale blue eggs; then she of the rusty wing will be nigh to listen, and on the bending cat-tail will swing the Blackbird of the scarlet epaulet.

Does he still sing of Oolong tea? No! the tune's changed; now it's '*Glory-be-eeee, eggs-and-she-ee, belong-to-me-ee.*' So there is absolutely no reason to believe he has ever sung of Oolong or any other kind of tea.

"Down yonder on the old gray fence I see a gray and yellow mottled bird piping his lay in answer to the

**Meadow-  
lark**

Blackbird. That is the Meadowlark. He is another excellent example of protective coloring. His spring suit is a mixture of gray, light brown, yellow, and buff, with a band of jet across the yellow breast. Only such sharp eyes as yours would be able to detect the bird's whereabouts on the meadow if he did not betray that by his shrill, swinging whistle, which is pitched high in the uppermost octave of the piano. The tone of his voice reminds one of a sweep of the bow across the high string of a violin. Perhaps he is telling his mate '*Spring's here my dear*'; if so, there's not much truth in that until the last day of May has arrived, and of course on the first of June he must change his tune; then it might be '*Some summer's day they'll cut the hay!*'—a menacing operation from the Meadowlark's point of view. Why? I'll tell you. The nest is on the ground among the tufts of meadow grass, carefully hidden from sight by the overhanging sedges and grass-blades; you would not succeed in discovering it unless



Red-winged Blackbird



you flushed the setting bird, and then she would not fly directly off the nest but would run a little way from it before taking wing—a wise way of doing, because it would make it so much the less easy for you to succeed. If you do, why, there are the four or five little speckled treasures about which the mother bird worries! Imagine the mowing machine smashing through such a snug little home and wrecking all in its path! This is exactly what does happen sometimes in the southern parts of New York and New England where the haying season begins early. But very often the builder of the nest chooses the safer tangled margin of the field, where, in a hidden location she remains quite undisturbed, and the home escapes a very sad fate. To Mr. Gibson's ear the notes of the Meadowlark suggest '*I see you,*' and that is not far from the shorter form of the song; but I think the thing for everybody to remember aside from the number of syllables it contains is its violin-like tone and high pitch. No other bird sings with such a swinging whistle.

“Over among the alder bushes on the slope toward the river, you can see half a dozen Yellow Redpolls sitting very quietly on the branches, trying, I imagine, to make up their minds about the weather, and where they'll fly to-day. They belong to the

**Yellow  
Redpoll  
Warbler**

Warbler family and are always among the early arrivals. I've an idea that they regret it and are not quite content. It is easy to put yourself in the place of one of them and do a little thinking out loud for the benefit of the other fellows in this wise: 'It's fickle April, and my feet are cold; at best there's not much food in sight anywhere, so what under the sun did we hasten to come all the way up here for so early? Not a tree's in leaf yet, and only a few bursting buds show that the branches have awakened from their winter sleep. The brook is rushing like mad to get somewhere else, and Phoebe is yelling to his mate to come and see it washing away all the mud he needs to build the nest with. My! but April is slow; only the grass and the skunk cabbages are green. The margin of the river is alive with frogs and toads, and the air is full of their noise—nothing cheerful about croakers! yet we do like to be near running water. I hope you see things as I do; perhaps we would better be on the move.' And the others reply with a '*We-see-see-see-see*' in the same dry-as-chips monotone as that of the Chipping Sparrow, and they depart for another tree!

"The Yellow Redpoll is very jaunty; his cap is chestnut red, his chest and eyebrows bright yellow, on his sides are ruddy streaks, and on his back a coat of olive green. As for his tail, well, that is his point



of distinction; like Phœbe, he works it up and down like a pump handle; indeed, it bobs incessantly, as if he were in nervous expectancy of a flight for his life. Although he has really nothing to offer in the line of music, it seems as if he could lead the band successfully with such a tail as that, though I'm sure the bird orchestra would have no use for a leader. He is not a fellow with whom we could become very intimate, either, for he will not stay with us long, and you observe he is anything but content with his surroundings now. By the middle of May he will be up and off for the far north and a month later he will finish his travels somewhere in Ungava or on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay. To be sure, during the winter in the south he makes himself at home in the streets and gardens of the town, but in the north he is simply a wanderer, a passer-by with no interest in things about him. Unlike the other Warblers he has a liking for the ground, the fields, and roadsides.

“Not so the other jolly little Myrtle Warbler perched atop the lonesome pine, singing cheerfully and contentedly to the wide unlistening world. The Yellow Red-

**Myrtle  
Warbler**

poll discusses with his fellows the urgent need of an early move northward, but this Myrtle Warbler, who has probably been with us all winter, bursts into a lisping song on the coming of spring, and with

an uplifting tilt of voice says, '*This tree's a happy home for me,*' or, '*I'll sing the summer long to thee.*' He is another attractive little fellow decked out in a plaid of gray, blue, and black, with a patch of yellow gold on his head, one on either side of his breast, and another just above his tail. He is named for the interesting little myrtle bush which covers some of the barren sandy land of New York and New England. He is very fond of its berries and they form a large part of his fall and winter diet. In spring and summer you will meet with him darting here and there among the branches of the trees ever on the alert for insects. On the top of old Mt. Mansfield, the highest of the Green Mountains of Vermont, where some day in June I hope to take you, he spends the whole of a morning snapping up flies and other insects which make free to warm up on the windows and sunny walls of the Summit Hotel. He does not mind in the least your presence on the piazza within a few feet of his operations. He finds his dining table spread on the walls of the house, the boughs of the spruce, and the plants of the garden, among the myrtles on the moors of Nantucket, and in the evergreen forests of the White Mountains. He is a happy creature of circumstance and makes the best of anything that comes his way; hence he is a summer bird, and also a winter bird,



Field Sparrow  
(above)

Chipping Sparrow  
(below)



finding no dearth of food wherever he may choose to stay.

“The nest is built in the cone-bearing trees perhaps six or eight feet up on some sheltered bough. The eggs are dull white flecked with brown. The nest is bulky, and not very closely woven, in this respect it is not equal to that of any one of the other Warblers, which are as a rule rather neat and particular builders. It is composed of dead twigs of the spruce and hemlock, old dead leaves, rootlets, and a few hairs and feathers, which last form the inner lining.

“In the fall of the year the Myrtle Warbler exchanges his plaid suit for one of mixed brown without any black, and with very little of the yellow except that at the root of the tail. In October large flocks gather in the southern parts of New Hampshire immediately after leaving their summer home among the spruces and hemlocks of the cool ravines and slopes of the White Mountains, and though many continue their flight southward to the West Indies and Panama, a goodly number remain for the winter content to fly from tree to shrub and roadside, examining every twig and branch, brush-heap and stone wall, for hidden worm, grub, and caterpillar. In the mountains this Warbler is a common companion of the Peabody Bird, the Junco, and the Blackpoll Warbler; and if we should ascend Mt.

Lafayette this coming summer we might find he had arrived there ahead along with the others and was waiting to greet us! But we could never be sure of that without catching the bird in a trap, attaching a numbered, metal band to his leg, freeing him, and again catching him on the mountain top! It is needless to add that there would be about one chance in a million for success in that direction, so I must know my bird by his song or not at all. At the same time it is interesting to learn that scientifically numbered and recorded birds have been known to return by the score to the same spot year after year, and that the traps temporarily imprisoning them did not frighten them away. Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin writes that he has released the same bird three times in one hour, and frequently the same bird four or five times in one day; these he called 'repeaters.'<sup>1</sup> That's all right for the bird, but when you're a man and vote twice at the Polls in one day you don't get off so easy! But our morning with the birds is quite exhausted and we must hasten home or it will go as hard with Parter as it does with the repeater."

<sup>1</sup> See "Bird-banding by Means of Systematic Trapping," Proceedings of the Linnæan Society of New York, No. 31, 1919.



## CHAPTER IV

### MAY

“‘HARK, hark! the lark at heaven’s gate sings.’ Get up Boy Blue, you’re behind with your harking and your horn-blowing! Even your old Haystack with Lafayette and Tecumseh is awake before you this morning and smiles at the birds and the risen sun. Is that the way you mind your birds? Lie on Macduff, or else get up.”

Thus Parter roused his grandson one early May morning with a hotchpotch of Mother Goose and Shakespeare, and the boy sprang from his bed with laughing face and eyes as blue and wide as the violets on the grassy terrace down below. Up, washed, and dressed in less time than the process reasonably demanded, he was quickly at his grandfather’s side and wandering over the green pasture starred with the bloom of anemones and trailing arbutus. Everywhere amongst the trees and the shrubbery arose a chorus of bird voices in a happy, confused medley of exultant song.

“However am I to tell which bird sings what with

all the crazy loons going it at once at the point of their bills?" discouragingly commented the boy, "they are off the key and out of time. It sounds like the Symphony Orchestra tuning up beforehand, but these birds keep right on tuning."

"Yes, it is a jumble," responded Parter, "but the pipers are unorganized and wildly competitive; each one blows his own trumpet to the limit in the effort to get ahead of the other fellow with—'O, it's nice to get up in the morning, and outwhistle the rest at the dawning!' It seems to me more like a musical potpourri, or plain hash in the natural key, chopped into hemisemiquavers, seasoned with sharps and flats, and a sauce of trills over all! You have to open your ears wide to hear any single strain and shut them tight at the same time to keep out all the rest. But we will try to sort out the tangled skein of melody. My ear detects the Field Sparrow here, and the Red-eyed Vireo over yonder. Robin, Bluebird, Song Sparrow, Chippy, Peabody Bird, Red-winged Blackbird, Chebec, Catbird, and Cuckoo are more or less distinguishable according to their distance, it altogether depends upon your ability to disentangle the skein and hold fast to the thread of some one bird's musical argument.

"Near us, on the pasture fence, is the Field Sparrow singing his plaintive little ditty, just a few slow

notes with a lilt upward or a dip downward followed by a trill. He always sings just that way, with little variation. The tune may run wrong end to, or upside down, or right side up; it may be doubled up or cut down; it does not make any difference, one recognizes it by its rhythm, and what Parter chooses to call its depth of expression, and its reverence. It is not the kind of music that trips along in the torn, bedraggled skirts of ragtime, but it softly glides like my Lady Moon through fleeting clouds, lighting their edges as she passes with her silvery smile. Among all the voices of the morning's choral, none seems so quiet and unassuming as this of the Field Sparrow; he sings, *'Sweet, sweet, sweet, my pretty little lady bird arise,'* I should think almost any indifferent little lady could not resist a pleading song like that! Perhaps when we return this way she may be perched on the stone wall beside him; but no doubt she got up as early as he.

**Field  
Sparrow**

“The Field Sparrow, the Chippy, the Swamp Sparrow and the Tree Sparrow are dressed very much alike; they all have ruddy caps, indistinct wing-bars, grayish vests, and mottled brown coats, but this fellow's bill and legs are a brownish pink, and that distinguishes him quite markedly from the others. He is not well named, as you will find he

likes the bushy pasture more than he does the open field. He is a great destroyer of grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars—not of the fuzzy order, and also a devourer, during the spring and winter seasons, of weed seed. Mid-May is the beginning of his nesting time, and he is likely to raise two broods, the second, between the twentieth of June and the middle of July. The nest is built on the ground or near it, and the white or blue-white eggs are strongly speckled about the larger end with ruddy brown.

“Ha! what flash of crimson is this which flaunts itself in our faces; did you catch it as it passed? A

### Purple Finch

Purple Finch! and there he is with five of his kind in the tree just ahead. They look like House Sparrows dipped unsuccessfully in a deep red dye. We ought to call the fellows *Crimsonicus harvardiana*—Harvard Crimson in honor of the college color. But his absurd real title is *Carpodacus purpureus*, which would mean he is purple! Evidently he who named him was color blind or else did not know the proper names of colors, for *purpureus* is a medieval term which belongs to no bird this side of the equator. It reminds one of Carolyn Wells's Purple Cow which neither she nor anyone else ever saw. I've never seen and never expect to see a purple Finch, a purple rooster, or a purple cat—but we might meet with any one or all of

them in a Cubist's picture and survive the shock! Some of the Finches in this tree beside us look as if they had escaped from the dyer's hand before he reached the vat and were slightly stained in the handling, others appear to have received a mere head and shoulder dip, and still others a most thorough ducking. There is a wide difference in the kind of color too; occasionally a bird is decidedly pink and again another will look as if he were sprinkled with brickdust. The birds of red coloring which visit us in winter—members of this same Finch family—are also very variable; sometimes brilliant, and sometimes dull, often a rich scarlet-lake, and still oftener a sober Venetian red. Young birds, you must remember, are always oddly colored, too, and in their second year they begin to put on the crimson.

“The Purple Finch is a delightful warbler, he sings few if any steady notes, but shakes or trembles on almost every one; that is what warbling really is, but he is apt to swing to a high note and drop back just before he finishes his song in a very winsome, persuasive way, and this is what distinguishes his music from that of every other warbler. He ripples along like a brook in the sunshine over the glistening stones; perhaps he is calling his mate:

“The emerald leaves flickering  
The dewy grass glistening,

The fretful brook bickering,  
 The Meadowlark's whistling  
 Spring's here, come to me, Dear!

It's a sentimental song, perhaps, but it carries with it cheeriness and the breath of spring; and then, of course, there is the mate to be considered, and you would naturally think she was the most beautiful creature in the world after listening to such a wonderful roundelay—but she isn't! Alack! her coat is of the dullest, sparrowlike, streaky brown and gray, without a crimson ribbon of a feather to brighten it.

“This Purple Finch is often with us in winter, and we are likely to see him in December or February when the snow is on the ground and the inviting seeds on the window-shelf attract him. We will find his nest in the cone-bearing trees of the open woodlands or the pasture; it is not very high up in the tree, and it will contain four or five pretty, brown-spotted, green-blue eggs.

“We are in the thick of the music of the Finch Tribe this morning, and as the scurrying confusion of it slackens will be able to distinguish some of the sweet singers without difficulty.

**White-throated Sparrow** There is the White-throated Sparrow, or so-called Peabody bird, in the maple over there, you can see his white throat and black-



striped crown quite distinctly. How clear and soft his perfect whistle is! No one can quite imitate its charm and dainty sweetness. Always the rhythm is the same: *Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*, or, *Sow wheat Peaverly, Peaverly, Peaverly*, or—and naturally you ought to be in Canada to hear this—*O sweet Canada, Canada, Canada*, or, if you are the right girl with the right name he will call to you, *O hear me Theresa, Theresa, Theresa*, or if you are an idle, lounging, whittling, country fellow he will chide you with, *All day long whittlin', whittlin', whittlin'*. Yes, there are lots of ways of translating the song, but the words always seem to refer to oneself and not to the bird—who and where you are, what you are doing, and what you ought to do! There, if you listen a moment and stop giggling you will hear what that Peabody bird over yonder has to say about yourself: *All noontime fiddlin', fiddlin', fiddlin'*. Evidently he heard you practicing on your violin yesterday, and took note of the hour that got on the family's nerves! But musically speaking, you see, he always sticks to triplets, and you can fit any syllables you like to these; they are the gist of his song. He is so friendly he comes halfway to meet you, and flies near your cap because your whistle so closely resembles his; he thinks possibly that there is another White-throat hidden in your hair and would investigate—truth to

tell he is desperately inquisitive. He even grows a bit quarrelsome with his fellows and jealously snaps his bill at one and another that ventures near you—he would do all the investigating himself.

“No other bird has a clearer, sweeter whistle or greater accuracy of pitch; he sings in the highest octave of the piano, and often goes beyond it. He is at once the most popular and well-dressed member of his tribe except, perhaps, the White-crown. A white throat, a black-and-white striped head, a touch of yellow in front of the eye and at the bend of the wing, a brown-gray coat and white wing-bars—these all contribute to make him a bird of stylish tone and cut. Everyone who hears his song is attracted by its clearness and simplicity, and all who become acquainted with his sociable ways learn to love him. Heigh there! He is on your cap now and is craning his neck over the edge to see if the other fellow is in your hair or on your shoulder. ‘No, no one is there,’ he says to himself, ‘and I would better go; there may be trouble for me under that cap, and I mustn’t risk it.’ So off he goes, again he sings, and the other fellow joins in, out of time and tune—he stops—‘Après vous, Gaston,’ he seems to say, ‘it is ungentlemanly to interrupt, allez-vous en.’ At the same time, please notice, if Gaston flies too near you he will be after him with his sharp bill! I sus-

pect he is a French Canadian, brought up in polite society.

“He breeds in the evergreen forests of the north, from the White Mountains to Ungava, Keewatin, and Mackenzie. He is always found upon the mountains, on the borders of cool woodlands, in rocky glens, rarely in the depths of the forest, and invariably on the shaded roadways. From May to July his song is heard in all our northern valleys, and he sometimes remains with us all through the year. The nest is near or upon the ground, and the four or five eggs within it are bluish white and speckled. He has a cousin called the White-crowned Sparrow who resembles him in appearance, though lacking the white throat and the yellow stain before the eye and at the bend of the wing. This fellow is a frequent companion of the White-throat, but he is rather rare in the southern part of his range, and is not in the present company, though it is still early May and he does not retire northward until the end of the month. If he were here now and sang for us we would instantly know the song by its difference from that of the White-throat. There is a strong similarity in the voices of the two birds but none in the form of the song; its rhythm is altogether different, there’s nothing to match with Peabody whittlin’, fiddlin’ or

**White-  
crowned  
Sparrow**

otherwise amusing himself. He sings sentimentally to his mate in a slow, persuasive way:

“My song is ever of thee  
Sweetheart, come live with me.  
Now hill and pasture gay  
Smile with the flowers of May.

Those two last lines, I must admit, are human; they ought to run—

“O'er bush and grassy way  
Swarm all the bugs of May!

That would be far more of an attraction to the bird—what cares she for ‘The flowers that bloom in the Spring, Tra la!’ But I suppose we should journey to the far north and inspect the country there if we would know what the little fellow really does sing about; at least I am sure that when there’s a shortage of bugs and seeds up there he comes down here to eat up ours—and he is very welcome. His summer home extends from Keewatin and Ungava away north to the southern part of Greenland, and he is also at home among our mountains of the far West. Our only chance of seeing him is in late April and through May, and from late September to near the end of October, the times of the spring and fall migrations.

"Here, almost under our feet, is the sociable little Chippy or Chipping Sparrow. We see him so often about the house that he needs no introduction, yet it is well to know him by name; this is *Spizella socialis*, or in plain

**Chipping  
Sparrow**

English the sociable little piper, for the scientific title is of Greek origin, *spiza* meaning to pipe or chirp, and *ella* meaning little. Surely this is a very appropriate name for the trustful bird who quite often hops on our doorsill. But alas, for the name! the scientist, never content with a good thing, has changed it; the bird is no longer *socialis*, that is, sociable, but is *passerina*, a sparrow—as if we did not know that already!"

"How would it do, Parter," exclaimed the boy, "to send the fool-catcher after that man, paint him up with molasses, roll him on the inside of a feather pillow, and hang him on the clothes line to dry, where the birds can peck at him; at least they'd like the molasses."

"Yes," assented Parter, "it reminds one of fly-paper, and they say revenge is sweet, so Chippy should enjoy the man's penalty, and he is none the less sociable for having his name changed; you observe he is only a few feet away from us, and is 'right on the job' which is evidently the collecting of dried grasses and rootlets for the new nest. He is a

'brick-top' in the full sense of the term; a regular red-headed, gray-eyebrowed, comfortable, homely, sociable 'snapper-up of unconsidered trifles' who hangs about the kitchen quarters, gratefully accepting any contributions of crumbs or tidbits which fall from the table. Often he mistakes his way and after properly entering by the door attempts to leave through the glass of the closed window, and it's useless to argue with him about the character of its transparency; he would probably say, 'nothing can get in my way and be invisible—and that's all there is to it!'

"He and his mate have made their home in the apple tree not far from our kitchen door, no doubt, in every summer of their lives, and their children have followed suit. It would not be difficult to do that by catching your bird and banding his leg. He comes in the kitchen summer after summer and rescues many a crumb from the dust pan; he sits in the tree season after season and flings his 'chips' lavishly about all of a summer's day—especially if it is hot! If he didn't do so one might think more of the family and of the song; but *Chip-chip-chip-chip-chip-chip* going right along at the rate of six chips a second in job lots of five seconds each has a very depressing effect on the mind if not on the market—it is what some people would call 'dirt cheap.' The nest of this Sparrow is



usually tucked away snugly in the branches of a tree or bush, never very far up, I have found very few higher than my head. It is skillfully lined with hairs of any and all kinds, and generally holds four or five greenish blue eggs, wreathed near the larger end with brown specks. The mother bird will often hatch two broods in a season, and she will feed her young with no end of green worms; I have counted as many as twenty-five within half an hour. I know of nests which for five years have been built in a little spruce tree conveniently near the kitchen windows of a cottage not far from ours, and I have no doubt we shall see another nest being built there within a few days. Chippy is also a great devourer of seeds, and in autumn he frequents the open fields for what he may pick up there; at that time he exchanges his red cap for a soberer one of striped brown.

“Now Mr. Catbird is trolling off his long rigmarole about something apparently very important to himself and nobody else. If that isn’t  
**Catbird**  
so then why does he hide himself in the bushes down there by the gurgling brook and not come straight out in the open and speak to the whole countryside as the Thrasher does? It is his way to be a bit ‘under the rose’—that flower being the emblem of silence—and make all his quaint speeches in the privacy of the thicket. But the month of

roses is June, not May, and he must do his disputing and meowing 'under the willow where the early violets die'—to quote from Sir Walter Scott. He is a skulking bird if ever there was one, and you will always see him dodging about and shifting his perch among the elderberry bushes or the alders and the willows, raising his crest, or drooping his wings and showing the rusty red color under and back of them. He is very fussy and nervous and fears you will discover the nest. When you do, you will find it contains three, or as many as five, beautiful deep blue-green eggs, and both he and his mate will kick up a terrific rumpus until you leave the vicinity. He is a beautiful, even slate-gray color with a darker—almost black—head and tail, his figure is slender and graceful, and he has a constant habit of pumping his long tail which perkily points upward a good deal of the time. He is a bird of the valley and scarcely of the mountainside, he never nests among the forest evergreens, but you may find he makes his home in the spruce shrubbery that borders the lawn, he arrives from the south any time between the first and the tenth of May, and does not leave us until the first of October.

“I have my own opinion about his music and that does not altogether agree with what other people have written. Listen to him now! What else could



Catbird



Warbling Vireo

you call such a song but *wild*? There is no order or method about it; he never talks loudly but always jerkingly about something requiring argument; he seems to insist like the lawyer in court that he is all right and the other fellow all wrong. He is an imitator and copies anything from the squeak of an iron gate to the song of a Thrush. You can place only half his singing on the musical staff, the rest of it ought to be thrown in the waste basket like so many bits of torn-up paper—worthless scraps. Yet the better half is like a string of pearls in the moonlight, soft and charming, delicate and refined, just perfectly beautiful as every bird-song should be. But then comes that fateful, discordant, nasal *meow*, and it does jar one—still, even a Catbird may change his tune.

“Directly over our head sings the Red-eyed Vireo, a bird forever heard and never seen. He always manages to hide himself, like the Catbird, quite out of sight. Away in the top of the maple, in the thick of the leaves he, also, carries on an argument about something in which no one appears to have any interest but himself. Heaven only knows why he shouldn’t be a perpetual sufferer with the so-called clergyman’s sore throat, for he is at it with his disputations—excepting small intervals for refreshments, a sort of

**Red-eyed  
Vireo**

diet of worms—from sunrise to sunset, and he will sing from now on to early August. You may always know his song by its disjointed jerkiness and its pot-pourri of clustered, rapid notes without a suggestion of melody. There is nothing extraordinary about it, but it's good to hear; not the best of the Thrushes can give us such a blithe, cheery, lively roundelay! he is all ripples and triplets and nothing more. In the gayest of spirits he trips along with his musical clusters, 'and I laugh when I hear him in spite of myself' as Professor Moore did when he got a full view of St. Nicholas on that famous Christmas eve! He is a jolly bird or else there is no joy in any bird—and that, Parter does not believe. I find in my note book, this comment on the bird's song written many years ago. 'It is a hot midsummer's day and I am on the wooded island of Petrea in Lake Mahopac, New York. Far up in the tree top where the light is greened by the multitude of leaves a little unseen bird sings; I am sure it is the Red-eyed Vireo, for the notes come lilting down through the foliage like flickering sunlight; they are in distinctly separate, clearly whistled groups, and are pitched in the highest octave of the piano, but in no definite key. In fact, they would exactly account for the saying of Henry Ward Beecher, that the bird 'paused between each mouthful of food to give thanks to Heaven.'



Wilson Flagg, an authority on birds, calls him The Preacher, and credits him with explaining his subject and then adding 'You see it—you know it—do you hear me—do you believe it?'

"He is one of our commonest birds, and he stays with us from the first of May to the middle of October, singing nearly all of the time. He chooses his residence in every city, town, village, the countryside far and wide, valley, hill, and even the wooded summits of high mountains. Perhaps I might say with justice that he is the only singing bird that takes to the woods, for his song is one of the commonest things one meets with in the wildernesses of the Adirondack and White Mountains.

"The Red-eyed Vireo's nest is rather a sagging one suspended at the forking of a branch or twig; it is basket-shaped and is neatly woven with strips of bark, grasses, shreds of weed stems, and the like. Almost anything will suit the need of the bird if it is soft and pliable, even spider's nests and cotton grass. A young lady friend once showed me a nest belonging to her collection, in which was woven a bit of newspaper with part of the print in plain sight; among other things it read, 'Front door this side.' The nest usually contains three or four white eggs speckled with umber brown. If you could see the bird you would say he was most refined and dainty;

his back is olive brown, his crown ash-gray margined by an almost black line beneath which is a strong white eyebrow, his eye is large and characterized by a red iris (but this you would not see unless you held the bird in your hand), the wing is dark brown-olive

**Warbling** with no wing-bars, and the underparts  
**Vireo** are cream white. His next of kin is the

Warbling Vireo who is simply grayer and smaller; the underparts of this bird are slightly tinged with pale greenish yellow at the sides.

"We can readily disentangle the song from the others down by the roadside for it is the only one which rolls along continuously and stops abruptly on a high note. The quality of its tone is distinctly burred, it is not a clear whistle, to imitate it I must hum and whistle at the same time; in short, it hasn't the remotest resemblance to the interrupted song of the Red-eyed Vireo, and you could not possibly get the songs mixed in your mind once you become fully acquainted with them. This cheery little warbler is always so very busy among the tree tops that it is a wonder he finds time enough to sing; but business and music with him are inseparable, never *stopping* to sing, never idle a moment, he warbles with a sweetness like unto a sugarplum rolled about in his bill, *'Can't you see it's best to work and sing like me!'* or, *'I'll clear this tree of every wriggling worm I see!'* At

most there are not more than twelve syllables to his song, and it runs along slow enough for you to count them. His voice, you will notice, also carries something of argument and persuasion with it, but that is just our own human way of interpreting it. Syllables or words mean nothing to the bird; he sings for the very joy of it, and

“The meaning doesn’t matter  
If it’s only idle chatter  
Of a transcendental kind.

The nest of this Warbling Vireo is like that of the Red-eye, but smaller, and its exterior is not so uniformly ornamented with spider’s nests and bunches of cotton grass.

“The monotonous, cooing notes we hear along with the two Vireos’ songs, come from the copse beside the river, and they are those of the Black-billed Cuckoo. If you listen attentively to the song you will detect a double tone to each note; for example, a combination of C and A in the second octave above middle C on the piano keyboard. That places the pitch of the bird’s voice exactly. He is really the lowest whistler of all the singing birds, and it is well to remember that, for a song in a very low register all by itself can at once be absolutely identified by any

**Black-  
billed  
Cuckoo**

one with a musical ear. He sings, too, in groups of two, three, or four notes at a time; listen; he is now singing in 'threes': *Coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-cou-ooo, coû-coo!* It is a very calm, quieting song, and it ought to have been the one that put the baby to sleep of Mother Goose fame—the baby in the tree top whose cradle was rocked by the wind. But the rhyme did not include the hushaby song of the Cuckoo, nor the crooning of the Indian squaw, for you should know the rhyme had its origin in the Indian mother's habit of hanging her little papoose up in the tree for his nap, out of harm's way. I have no doubt many an Indian baby has been sung to sleep by his own American Black-billed Cuckoo among the cherry blossoms of May, and in the leafy month of June. The Cuckoo of Europe sings the two tones separately, our bird combines and but very rarely separates one from the other, in fact, what seems like a separation is merely two broken songs on two keys.

"Our bird is a bird of character for she builds her own nest, poor though it may be, and hatches her own eggs, which is more than can be said of her foreign relative, although, I must admit, there are exceptions to the rule, for Mr. Elon Howard Eaton says, 'rarely the Cuckoo lays her eggs in the nests of the Robin and Catbird.' Her own nest is hardly more than a



Yellow-throated Vireo

Red-eyed Vireo



Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos



rude platform of sticks lined with grasses and leaves, and the eggs are a pale blue-green. Frequently nests are found containing both fresh eggs and newly hatched chicks, so Mrs. Cuckoo evidently is quite irregular, unmethodical, relax, and at once a poor house-builder. But that is better than washing your hands—I ought to say claws—of all responsibility, and shifting all your family with its affairs and cares on your neighbor! The bird looks like a slender dove with a long, sharp, curved bill which is a splendid tool for wrecking the webby habitations of the tent caterpillar; he counts not less than twenty hairy (or otherwise) caterpillars, for a square meal, and Mr. Eaton says he will make way with as many as four dozen; in any case that is doing more than well for our apple and cherry trees, and we should be very grateful for the service.

“There is another so-called Yellow-billed Cuckoo which is quite absent in this region and in the Adirondack, Green, and Catskill Mountains, but we would find him in southern New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. With your field-glass you would be able

**Yellow-  
billed  
Cuckoo**

to see, in a good light, his yellow under mandible, the rest of the bill being sepia black like that of the other bird. The Yellow-bill has a large patch of white at the tips of the three outer blackish tail feathers, the

Black-bill has small tips of white on all but the inner pair. The Yellow-bill indulges in a series of guttural notes barren of musical tone which sound like, *Kr-kr-kr-olp*, *cowlp*, *cowlp-olp*, *cowlp-olp*, *cowlp-olp*, and so on until the sounds gradually die away. A cinnamon or rusty red color shows in the wings of this bird as it flies. The Black-bill comes from the northern parts of South America and arrives here about the fifteenth of May, and takes his departure about the middle or end of September.

“The morning hour has passed and we must retrace our steps setting the pace to the quick note of the

**Chebec** Least Flycatcher, the little brother of

Mrs. Phoebe, he sings in presto time. His voice rises from every third or fourth tree along the path, so I judge he must have journeyed north with a score of companions. He is calling, *Cheap-er*, *Cheap-er!* Maybe the price of flies has advanced and he wants a reduction in the high cost of living, or, if it isn't this, then certainly the market-man is dishonest. *Cheat-er! Cheat-er!* he cries, and he is very insistent, jerking his tail with emphasis every time he repeats the word. His common name is Chebec; you are at liberty to believe he calls that or anything else provided the word has two syllables, the first of which is given in a buzzing tone. He is the smallest of the Flycatchers, and his colors are olive

gray and dull white with a yellowish tinge; he has ashen white wing-bars, but these are not very distinct as you see him against the bright sky. The nest is well up in the tree, anywhere from twelve to thirty feet, and the three or four eggs are creamy white. A neater and cleaner housekeeper than Phoebe, the Chebec takes such good care of herself and her home that she is never bothered by undesirable tenants. The Flycatchers all get their food literally on the wing, and no flying insect is safe twenty feet away from their perch, which is often the topmost twig of the apple tree. Imagine your complete 'Bill of Fare' flying through the air—bacon, fried eggs, roast beef, apple pie, ice cream, and cake! Think of sitting in an apple tree waiting with ready wing when each plate comes hurtling by to catch it on the fly! It sounds like *Alice in Wonderland*, but you have only to change the names of the dishes and it is the daily experience of the little Chebec; we hope he will relish his winged bug!"

## CHAPTER V

### MAY (*Continued*)

"MAY, lovely May is all a-bloom, and down on the meadow the birds are blithely singing, 'come on, here we are, most of us, now catch us if you can!' which," said Parter, "is precisely what we would like to do with our field-glasses if the feathered friends will be good enough to come within the field of vision. We make up a list of what we think we ought to see, but alas, it is often a difficult matter to check off the first name it bears. Then the unexpected turns up both out of time and harmony with our schedule! Don't be impatient if the bird you consider is the right fellow fails to appear. Years ago I went to a spot where I was assured the Rose-breasted Grosbeak sang. Instead of finding him, behold—the White-crowned Sparrow! but the records I obtained of his songs were infinitely more valuable than anything I could have obtained from the other bird. Something is sure to come one's way, but it is not always within one's power to choose what that something may be.

"I am not sure what we may find beside our river,



BELTED KINGFISHER





but on its brink are thousands of birds which never leave it for any great length of time. Do you hear the Veery? Yes, well that song is rarely heard very far away from still or running water. You hear, also a noisy, rattling

**Belted  
Kingfisher**

note. That's the Belted Kingfisher, and his one all-pervading idea is fish, fish, and plenty of 'em! You must keep your eye on the water if you are a fisherman. There he is now, the handsome, perky fellow, on that dead maple branch overhanging the stream; it is his observation perch, he awaits his dinner, and if a young fish rises to the surface for a floating bug, he will have him bug and all, before you have time to think about it. Occasionally he will consider aquatic insects acceptable as a side dish, but no doubt he would prefer polliwogs. Splash! there he goes almost under the water as I speak; now he is back on the tree with a rattling remark, his crest is erect with expectation, his big, slate-gray bill holds his prey, a four-inch trout, he shakes the water from his feathers, and with a—*'Crack his brains on the maple tree, another wriggling fish for me!'* proceeds to knock the life out of it on his perch, then gobbles it down whole, head first! But he is a big bird, twelve or more inches long, with a capacious gullet; he will not choke with a bone in his throat. He always appears fresh and alert with a breezy expression on his countenance

which, no doubt, is due to the shock-headed appearance of his crest feathers. I imagine he would willingly face half a gale with ruffled feathers and some discomfort if a fish blew his way! It is difficult to say exactly where his nest is—probably not far from here tunneled in the bank somewhere, or in a convenient sandy cliff. There is a distance of from four to six feet from the opening to the roomy nest-pocket which is usually lined with dried grasses and with fish bones and scales disgorged from the bird's stomach. In this pocket you would discover from five to eight white eggs as large as those of a pigeon.

“The Kingfisher is a picturesque bird with a coat of blue-gray, a broad white collar, and a few fine white spots on his wing the long feathers of which and those of his tail are slaty black. Under the wings and on the sides of the female and young male birds is a strong tinge of rusty red. With nothing but a watchman's rattle in his throat—when it is not occupied with fish—the Kingfisher, of course, has no place in the birds' orchestra; but he frequently finds himself in the artist's picture, so he may pride himself at least on his personal appearance. The European Kingfisher, a cousin of our bird, is a little beauty with a coat of intense sky, or azure blue, wings of green-blue turquoise spotted with cobalt, and a breast of orange-red. He is only seven and a half inches long.

In a wonderful, springtime picture of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, called *The Garden of Pan*, with a beautiful boy playing the Panpipes appears but one listener—it is the lovely Kingfisher clad in all the glory of his jewel-like colors.

“But there are beautiful birds which are singers as well within earshot of us. The Oriole, Song Sparrow, Catbird, and Black and White Warbler are all singing at once in the nearby trees, and from the woodland bordering the sandy beach beyond comes the harmonic notes of the Veery, or Wilson’s

Thrush. I think he ought to be called **Veery** the Æolian harp of the orchestra. His music makes one think of a silver crescent moon hung in the twilight sky of fairyland; if a silver moon could sing in a sapphire sky, then of course, it ought to sing mysterious music like that. There is no melody to the song, no distinct, clear-whistled note; nothing but a dreamy, unreal, weird mixture of sweet tones like those of the harmonica. Did you ever press your ear against a telegraph pole on a cold, clear day when the wind blows across the wires? If you did you would hear the musical hum of an Æolian harp. It is like the voice of the Veery, the breath of a fairy across the strings of a harp of gold. The only way you could imitate the song would be to sing very high through a comb covered with tissue paper, dropping

your voice at each word as you go, '*O Veery, veery, veery, veery.*' Perhaps the bird might come to you if the imitation were good, but I doubt it, for he is very shy and retiring, and skulks or dodges about in the thick foliage, with a wary eye on you, and a hummy-whistled call note, which tells you very plainly your presence is unwelcome.

"The Veery is the lightest colored Thrush of all, a nearly tan-brown; his throat is sepia spotted well down, and the buffy white breast scarcely at all. He loves to sing in the twilight hour, but has never beaten the Hermit at that game! He is a bird of the thin woodland that margins the river meadow. His harmony rings in the shade of the trees in the morning, at noon, and again in the shadows of the setting sun, at which time nearly all other birds have long since quieted down. Evidently Dr. Van Dyke knew this very well, or, with a touch of homesickness, he would not have written in some foreign land—'*And yet with every setting sun I listened for the Veery,*' and again, '*New England woods at close of day with that clear chant are ringing.*'

"The nest of this Thrush is hidden among the ferns or low shrubs and is on or very near the ground; it is built of strips or shreds of bark and weed stalks, and is set in rotted wood and leaves. Within it you would see from three to five greenish blue eggs.



Wood Thrush  
(above)

Veery  
(below)



Baltimore Oriole  
(upper figure)

Orchard Oriole  
(lower figure)



“Overhead sings the cheery Baltimore Oriole; no dreaminess in his song, its martial strain is a call to work and duty. He tootles along like the spirited fife that leads the regiment, **Baltimore Oriole** though his are piping times of peace, not war. But one cannot, I regret to say, keep step with his tune, for it is mostly set to the measure of rag-time! He drops a note here and there, throws in a few where they do not belong, shifts the accent to the wrong beat, and in general indulges in too many syncopations—for that is what we call these irregularities—to be a model performer! Nevertheless he is a spritely musician and a benefactor as well so we shall forgive him. He has led his songful life in the tree tops regardless of time in a ceaseless hunt for the wicked enemies of the tree.

“He has grubbed along well ‘knowing what he sought, and whistled as he went for want of thought.’ That is the way of the Oriole, other birds stop to sing, he doesn’t. I am simply putting the facts of the case in the poet Dryden’s own suggestive lines; the bird gobbles up a bug, whistles a bit and hunts for another; so he goes all day long and you may find yourself waiting in vain to hear a complete song. All you get is a sort of musical sandwich with grubs between! But he has routed out a lot of bugs, caterpillars, beetles, and aphids or plant lice; hence his

music has been subject to excusable interruptions. I suppose we may consider his remarks solely addressed to the creatures he captures, and not to us. *'Squirmy worm, out of that! tucked away like a bat. Beetle, slug, grub, and bug, war to the knife. No chance of life for one of you, when I get through!'* He will make a clean sweep of it, and there will not be much left on the leaves of his extensive table, the maple tree, at the end of the day.

"He is one of our handsomest birds, glorious in a costume of golden orange and black, the heraldic colors of my Lord Baltimore of the olden time; he has a long, sharp, black bill, and white wing-bars, his head and neck are black, and the orange is distributed between his breast, lower back, and outer feathers of the tail. You must remember he was named for Lord Baltimore and not for the city which bears that distinguished old English aristocrat's name. It is important to understand that very many names of localities, like Nashville, Philadelphia, Connecticut, and Louisiana are quite meaningless and misleading; ornithologists and others have applied them mostly through some chance happening, and without a thought of the future student. One might innocently suppose, for example, that the State of Tennessee was full of Tennessee Warblers, but you might spend many Mays there and if you discovered more than

one **you** would be lucky, for the bird really lives in the far north and does not breed farther south than the northern White Mountains of New Hampshire, perhaps twenty miles north of us! Yes, names are very unreliable; this Oriole is sometimes called the Golden Robin though he is not a Robin, nor any relative of that bird, and what is worse in this mix-up of names the Robin himself is not a true Robin but a very near relation of the Thrush. Our nearest relative of the English Robin Redbreast is our Bluebird. Orioles are very variable in costume, too, and you might be puzzled sometime to understand why the birds were ever called 'golden' for the bird under three years of age is far from brilliant in color, and very young male birds look like their mother who is a dull brownish orange-yellow and grayish brown with more or less sepia black about the head and throat. Indeed, Mistress Oriole's dress is decidedly dingy, with the soberest of gray-brown furbelows. The hanging nest is a remarkable, thickly woven and felted pocket about six inches deep, composed of plant fibers, strings, horsehair and shreds of bark, generally gray in color and most skilfully interwoven, a marvelous example of bird industry. The nest will contain from four to six white eggs. In spite of the strong ingeniously woven nest and its apparently safe position in the tree

twenty-five or more feet up in the air, securely attached to a slender swinging bough, plunderers like the Screech Owl, Crow, Grackle, and Red Squirrel not infrequently visit it. The Oriole is not a very plentiful species, and between the danger of bad weather in times of migration, and of enemies that wreck the home, we find here and there and yonder a scant pair or two in one locality where we could easily locate a dozen pairs of Song Sparrows. Above our heads is a nest in this silver maple which swings in the breeze directly over the brimming river. I wonder how many young birds when they scramble from that safe little pocket lose their balance or their wing-control and pitch overboard! It is hard to tell, but, no doubt every June more than one unlucky little chap has come to his end that way and made food for the fishes because his cradle swung over the water somewhere along the one-hundred-and-thirty-mile course of the river to the great ocean beyond. In the month of November when the trees are bare of leaves you may often see the remains of two or even three nests of the Oriole in a maple or an elm on the broad meadow through which winds the shining river, and also in the trees which border the streets of our towns and villages. I know that individual birds return to the same place season after season, but I have no record of their rebuilding an old nest and occupying

it again. All things and weather properly considered, Mrs. Oriole is a wise bird; she takes no chances by 'putting new wine into old bottles.' That he and she return to the old spot, there is no possible shadow of doubt, for my song records show that. One bird I remember in the city of Cambridge returned three years in succession and sang a modification of an old melody called *Rosin the Bow*,—a part of the first and second bars.

"Here, among the slender branches of a wild cherry is a little group of Cedar Waxwings. Not finding any red cedars in this vicinity—for which they have a special liking—they have taken themselves to the unpromising cherry, and are waiting there for the fruit to arrive! I fear it would be a desperately long wait, for the time of bloom is but just past and the fruit will not appear until August. They certainly do look discouraged but they are not starving by any means. When wild berries are scarce and the fruit trees have just reached the season of bloom there are insects in plenty which they find very acceptable, among them the cankerworm of the apple tree; they often fly up in the air to catch passing insects as the Flycatchers do. The Waxwing is also called the Cherry Bird, and I imagine he may be figuring with this tree at the present moment for the whole summer crop 'at

**Cedar  
Waxwing**

the lowest market price.' Exactly what agreement the birds up there will make with the tree, I can't say, but I should think it ought to be an even exchange in the nature of, say, the guaranteed destruction of one worm per cherry! The fruit of this red cherry tree is about as big as a currant and it is acid enough to spoil one's disposition for life; nevertheless the birds do not seem to mind that in the slightest degree, on the contrary, it is evident they like the sour things, though for my part, if I were a bird I would confine my attentions to the black cherry trees whose fruit has a really attractive flavor. But there is no accounting for taste!

The Waxwing is a polite, sleek-feathered fellow dressed in a close-fitting, tailor-made suit of buffy or grayish brown, with slightly darker wings which are sealed, so far as appearances go, with a drop or two of red sealing-wax two thirds of the way down; his bill, chin, forehead, and a strip between the bill and the eye is black, over which he carries a stylish crest a trifle more buffy than the rest of him; there is a yellowish tinge to his under feathers which does not appear in his more northern and rarer relative, the Bohemian Waxwing; on the tip of the tail in both species is a somewhat broad margin of yellow.

The birds are very late nest builders and will roam about restlessly through Maytime in small numbers





Cedar Waxwing



in search of inch-worms, cankerworms, and hairy caterpillars which form their spring diet. But they will set up housekeeping by the middle of June, possibly in some fruit tree, in a branch ten to twenty feet above the ground; the nest is built of dried grasses and shreds of bark lined mostly with fine rootlets and moss; the eggs, four or five in number, are bluish gray, or lightly brown-tinted, thickly spotted with sepia and buff-brown.

"The Cedar Waxwing has no song; his remarks are monotonous, mild, and more or less intermittent. He keeps up an interrupted *sist, sist, sist*, deliberate, and pitched a tone or two higher than the uppermost note, C, of the piano. To imitate that you would have to lisp the tone D or D sharp, between your front teeth and the tip of your tongue. If you can do that you will exactly reproduce the note of the bird. He frequently strings a number of these dainty tones close together, but one could scarcely call that sort of a performance singing. He is a well-mannered fellow, and kindly disposed. I have never seen a group of the birds in a tree without a few being snuggled together side by side. They are politeness personified; Mr. Elon Howard Eaton tells us that one will pick a cherry, pass it on to the next fellow, who will pass it to the next, and so on it goes down the line until it reaches the furthestmost; then

again, on rare occasions it will be returned along a limb full of birds without one of them presuming to taste it on the way! It is true, they are sometimes reported as destructive of small fruits, but in the main they are of great benefit to the farmer, for they devour countless numbers of the fruit tree's deadliest enemies. The other Waxwing, cousin to the Cedar Bird, the Bohemian Waxwing, is, as I have already said, a far north species; it breeds throughout the Arctic zone, yet it frequently comes down this way in the winter and joins company with the Cedar Waxwing, but does not fly farther south than New England and New York. The bird closely resembles his relative, but he is larger, the under parts are gray, not yellowish, the longer wing feathers are yellow-edged, and there is a slight rusty tinge to the feathers on the forehead. Some winter's day he may turn up in a group of Cedar Birds, and with glass in hand, knowing these differences, you would recognize him in an instant. He is far from a stranger to Massachusetts of late years, and so recently as the winter of 1920 no less than three flocks of this species were observed in Maine.

"Now comes the unexpected! I did not suppose we would meet with the Heron, yet there he stands, sentinel of the Pemigewasset, unmindful of wet feet

in its shallow waters. 'Dark brown flows the river, golden is the sand,' yet he heeds neither—this Great Blue Heron—his mind is bent on fish! A daddy longlegs of a bird, deliberate, quiet, not greatly afraid of you yet cautious, he knows how much safety there is in the possession of powerful wings and nimble legs; you could only get him with a gun! He will allow you to approach just so near, not nearer. If you attempt a too close acquaintance those broad wings will spread, and with a few easy flaps of them he will rise and silently float away. Then you would probably see enough of what may be called blue about him to justify the name, for the under surface of the wings is a distinct gray-blue; true, there is also the same but deeper color between the eye and the bill, but he ought not to be called blue because of that. He is standing so quietly you have a fine opportunity to study his feathers. In general his back, wings, and tail are slate-gray, the head has a middle stripe of dull white which is bounded on either side with black extending backward into the long limp crest; the throat is white and the back of the neck gray-brown, on the breast are little streaks of black, and a little black also edges the longer wing-feathers.

**Great Blue  
Heron**

"The Great Blue Heron is often described as very timid and difficult to approach, but I do not find him

so. Let's put the matter to the test. We are standing not seventy-five feet away from him, and he knows it; we will draw nearer and you will see he will give ground with reluctance. Many years ago I allowed my canoe to float close to where one was standing above here on the other side of the river, until, without the aid of my glass I could see the yellow of his eyes, then he concluded my presence might be a menace, and with small show of fear took to his broad wings alighting again at no very great distance up-stream. This bird waits for some unwary fish or frog to swim his way; so far nothing has come, but when it does he will snap it up with that sharp bill of his so promptly there will be no chance of escape; there's a method in his stillness, as there is in all wild birds; they are either on the offensive or the defensive and much depends upon perfect quietude. If you were trying to catch a two-pound trout and everything hung upon your being absolutely still you would worry about your heart-beats. This Heron is a common visitor to our river which offers him a plentiful supply of minnows, frogs, little trout, and so on; often its meadows supply him with young and tender field mice which are quite as welcome on his bill of fare. We are approaching him cautiously along the bank, yet you see he is in no special hurry to leave. Now he is awake to some



possible danger, or he would not have changed his position—there! he moves nearer the sand bar twisting his neck this way and that to get a better view of us. I think he will draw the line very shortly at about thirty feet. Now he is really worried—he will rise in a moment. No, he will walk on a bit first. ‘This will never do,’ he argues, ‘those long-legged, impudent disturbers of my peace may be double-dyed villains; they are getting too familiar; I’ll have them understand they cannot come nearer. Adieu!’ and away he goes; so ends our interview with the Lone Fisherman. He looks large from our position here but he does not appear as large as he actually is; you can see his neck is doubled back as he flies and his legs trail out behind him, but if both were stretched out at full length, he would measure from the tip of his bill to the end of his toes about four feet, two inches, and the expanse of his wings would be the same. His plumage is variable according to age, and birds of less than two years are brownish and buffy where older ones are blackish and dull white. The range of this Heron is from northern South America north to the Arctic circle; it breeds locally throughout most of its North American range, but it is doubtful whether any of the old-time roosts are left in southern New York and New England; the destruction of our woods bordering the

water is mostly accountable for that. The nests are in colonies high up in the tops of the trees, often in cedar swamps; they are the rudest possible platforms of sticks and small twigs, and usually contain four dull, light blue-green eggs. The bird feeds by day and night, and Wilson, the old ornithologist, tells us that some people say he is fat at the full of the moon and lean at times of its absence; but I think there is a touch of moonshine about that which would be greatly dimmed in the light of investigation. You can imagine him, if you like, wading in the brackish shallows of the bulrushy sea coast marsh, on a moonlight night, conjuring up his fish supper in the words of the old poet, Leigh Hunt:

“Come! strange, astonished-looking, angle-faced,  
Dreary mouth’d, gaping swimmers of the sea  
Gulping salt-water everlastingly!  
I patient wait, though wishing you would haste.

I do not quote the words exactly, and do not mean to, for this version fits the case better. The voice of the Great Blue Heron is woefully hoarse and gruff. If he has anything to say in ordinary circumstances it is merely a croak or a frog-like *quark*; when greatly alarmed, or when he has been shot and wounded he utters such distressful hoarse squawks you would imagine some wild animal was tearing him limb from

limb, or some hunter's dog away in the distance was telling the world he was done to death with a gun!

"We will leave the river margin here and climb the wooded bank to the road, the other side of which is an open woodland where, I am sure, we will find one or two of the earlier Warblers. But before we turn our backs to the river, fix your

**Bank  
Swallow**

glass on those twittering skimmers of the water, called Bank Swallows. They are the smallest of the tribe—scarcely more than five inches long. Wonderful sailors through the air, are they, darting back and forth, wheeling about in all directions so constantly you wonder if there is anything special going on in their little world. No, there is not; it is their everyday pastime, and what is more important, their way of catching their prey. See how gracefully they skim over the surface of the water; no floating beetle or spider will escape them, no insect in the air is safe for a moment where they are, not even the little meadow grasshopper. In the sand bank on the other side of the river, you can count the nesting holes by the dozen not very far below the grassy edge. They are scratched out by the birds themselves and the depth will sometimes be as much as thirty inches; at the end of the tunnel you would find a snug nest of straw, grass, and feathers holding about five little pure white eggs. The birds have a rather buzzy,

reedy note, harsher and not so chippering as that of the Chimney Swift, and they are so constantly in motion it is hard for you to distinguish their coloring; that is in general a brown gray, the throat is dull white, and across the chest is a distinct brownish gray band. They always gather together in large colonies and you will never find them away from the sand bank of the river and marsh.

“Now we are among the trees again you can hear the lively notes of one of our commonest Warblers called the Black and White. Here he is circling the trunk of this elm beside us. He walks or creeps in any direction, upside down, right side up—it doesn’t make much difference which way—ever in search of the hidden grub, the larva of a beetle in one sense of the word, a square meal for him in another. He is a restless fellow as you may see by his continuous movements; he is never still a moment, when he sings, when he goes a-courting, he is always on the move, facing this way and that, ever moving in any direction that suits his whim! You would quickly find that in this respect he differed greatly from the more systematic Nuthatch, who at least winds his way up the tree trunk in an orderly spiral. His costume is a beautiful combination of bars and stripes in black and white; underneath he is mostly white. He is one



Black and White Warbler



Chimney Swifts

25



of the earliest of his tribe to arrive from the south and, no doubt, has been here since the first of May. You should be very particular to note the character of his song, for one might easily pass it as a monotonously even swing back and forth between two tones. That is not the truth of it. When it is completely sung the song is a double one; the first half is accented on the upper of the two tones, the second half is accented on the lower ones. It sounds as if a spirited fairy was indulging in hearty, chuckling laughter; it has never been properly described by writers about birds. If you listen attentively you will hear the bird shift his accent when he is halfway through, thus: *See-wé, see-wé, see-wé, see-wé, weé-se, weé-se, weé-se, weé-se*, and then it will die away in a whisper—what in music we call a delicate diminuendo, something difficult for people unacquainted with the rules of music to understand. But if you are past master of the violin you could squeak those two tones with their proper accents, and work out the diminuendo so perfectly the little bird might flutter to your bow in nervous curiosity to discover where the other fellow was hiding.

“The nest of the Black and White Warbler, or Creeper, as it is sometimes called, is on or near the ground, in the tangle of a wooded ravine or in a half-open woodland hidden beside a stone or old stump

amid brush and shrubbery like this about us here. The nest is a bulky affair woven with dried grass, rootlets, old leaves, and a few hairs; the dull white eggs are heavily spotted with brown.

"A most delightful and jolly little songster, if one can judge of the character of a bird by his song, is the

**Nashville  
Warbler**

alert and restless Nashville Warbler, who, with a score of his fellows, is making this group of young birches merry with his musical chirpings. Fix your glass if you can on one of the slippery fellows and you will see a bright yellow bird with a light gray-blue cap (in which is a tiny patch of ruddy feathers which do not show), a greenish gray coat, and wings without bars but distinctly olive green on the edges of the longer feathers. There he goes from tree to tree, back and forth, hither and thither with his companions who are all joyously a-wing! They are fairly rippling with laughter like children in a lively game of tag. Robert Louis Stevenson had just such a picture in his mind's eye when he wrote in his *Nest Eggs*:

"They shall go flying  
With musical speeches  
High overhead in the  
Tops of the beeches.

"If they could speak what do you suppose they would be saying to one another? Nobody knows;

but you could guess according to your own ideas, and it might be, '*Marié, Marié, Marié, Marié, pity-pity-pity-pit!*' or, in straight English 'Marie, Marie! what a pity you can't catch me': or, if nonsensical syllables are a better interpretation of the song, perhaps this would do: *Per-ché, per-ché, per-ché, per-ché, te-did-dle-te-de-de.*' In rhythmic time the bird sings 'lame-legged,' that is, he strongly emphasizes the second syllable at the expense of the first in the word *Marié*, or *Perché*; the last half of the song is a rapid but short trill. One must remember the Warblers are tiny birds with tiny throats and their voices in almost all cases are several tones higher than the uppermost note of the piano!

"The Nashville breeds from southern New England northward to Saskatchewan and Cape Breton Island, and winters from southern Texas to Guatemala. He arrives in central New Hampshire about the sixth of May, makes himself at home commonly among the gray birches of the half-open woodlands, and even ascends the mountains, where the tree-growth is scrubby, to a height of quite three thousand feet. The nest is a bit fragile, and is snuggled among the brush and brake in a sheltered nook directly upon the ground; it is constructed of moss, grasses, and fine rootlets; within you would probably find four or five dainty, cream-white speckled eggs.

“May is the month of the Warblers; they are winging their way northward at this present moment. Morning, noon, and night they fly to us from the far south stopping only long enough at this station or that on the happy journey to their summer homes in the north to pick up a luncheon of grubs which is waiting for them in every tree along the road. It would seem strange to us to picnic our way through the land with trees on every side like so many luncheon hampers; but that is exactly the case with the birds we call Warblers. Every other tree is laden with good things to eat, though each little package could scarcely contain such delicacies as ham sandwiches, sardines, olives, doughnuts, and the like. The Warblers get nearly all the food they require in the trees, and if you watch them closely you will find they spend most of their time examining every leaf—especially its under side—for cocoons, larvæ, worms, moths, and so forth. What would become of the trees if there were no Warblers no one could tell; but the appearance of those which have been attacked by the Gypsy and Brown-tail Moths and the Elm Beetle tell the story plainly enough without the aid of words.”

## CHAPTER VI

### SOME SOUTHERN BIRDS

PARTER and his grandson were on their way to visit Oakland in Western Maryland, the White Sulphur Springs, and the national battlegrounds and reservations in the vicinity of Chattanooga; "in each one of which places," said Parter, "we will be directly in the path of migration of many birds, especially the Warblers." The train in which they traveled had wound its way along the banks of the Potomac past the beautiful mountain gap, Harper's Ferry, and later had climbed the gradual rise through the hills of western Maryland which lay beyond Cumberland, a smoky city with extensive rolling mills for the manufacture of rails and other materials of railroad supply. Here the birds of May were singing in every tree in spite of the smoke and the noisy neighborhood of a very busy town, and the "Merry month of May" they made it, noise or no noise.

"Birds," remarked Parter, "unlike nervous people, do not seem to mind confusion, or noise, or smoke!

here's the Chimney Swift, for example, you can scarcely smoke him out. He insists that Parter built his studio chimney especially for him, and his mate takes possession of it near the top, glues her nest to its sooty side, and subjects her children to the fumes of burning birch and maple as if they were so many smoked herring! Occasionally one of the birds makes a mistake and leaves the chimney through the "back door," that is, by way of the fireplace, and then Parter goes to the rescue, not to the fire with tongs to remove a roasted bird, for there's no Swift foolish enough to risk his life passing through a back door with a fire kindled upon its threshold, but on some fireless day to the big window, where he is frantically thrashing the glass with baffled wings, utterly confounded with a totally invisible barrier to freedom. But I capture the flustered little creature, cautiously fold its wings in a firm but light grasp—and then look in its face! What a bright black eye it has, what beetling eyebrows! And its colors? Well, the books say fuscous with dull gray beneath; but some wise authors, like Bradford Torrey, say sooty, and that is about right, for if I were to paint the bird I would make up my palette with black and sepia which are about as near the color of soot as an artist can get. Perhaps you may think the Swift has lived so long in a chimney





Nashville Warbler

Golden-winged Warbler



MOCKINGBIRD

that his feathers have been smoked sepia black. Oh no! you must remember the Swift lived ages and ages before the chimney was invented. What did he do before it appeared in America? That is a question a great many people ask and one easily answered—he had to wait till it arrived contenting himself with any old hollow stump the primeval wilderness offered. You never see him perched on a tree or the telegraph wire, but always wheeling through the air with a company of his fellows, flinging his chippering notes in wide circles as he goes. He has been wrongly named the Chimney Swallow, but he is unrelated to that tribe. The fact is, he is not what is called a Passerine, that is, a perching bird, but is a rather near relative of the Hummingbird. Look at his wings! long, slender, powerful, and swift, supporting a tiny body and queer stumpy tail with spiked feathers; they were especially designed for sailing through the air as the broad white wings of a racing yacht are for sailing the seas. At nightfall the bird drops within the chimney or hollow stump, upon the perpendicular walls of which it clings with its sharp claws, using its spiky tail for additional support. The nest is a sort of semicircular pocket built of tiny twigs glued against the wall by the curiously gelatinous saliva of the bird; the egg is pure white. The birds as they arrive and depart from the chimney

make a strange suppressed roaring noise with their wings. The Swift is widely distributed over eastern North America from Saskatchewan to Newfoundland, southward to the Gulf and westward to the Great Plains. It winters in Central America. I have no doubt there are some old deserted and tumble-down chimneys in the city of Cumberland which are welcome homes for the birds, otherwise we would not have seen so many of them to-day constantly flying overhead. Of course they never choose a chimney in use, but get caught, sometimes; when one is temporarily out of service.

"It is apparent, too, that many other species are restlessly on the wing, for the general migration northward is not yet completed. We have already seen a flash of red which betrays the presence of the Cardinal Bird, so we are within the limits of his domain. Near one of the stations we have also heard the golden notes of the Wood Thrush, and I am convinced many of his tribe are still on their way to the farther north. At various times the notes of decidedly southern species have greeted us on our journey, such as the rapid *tea-kettle*, *tea-kettle*, *tea-kettle* of the Carolina Wren and the protesting *chucks* of the Yellow-breasted Chat."

Some days later, after the arrival of the travelers at the end of their journey and during their outing by

automobile to Chickamauga, a ride of about fourteen miles south from Chattanooga, Parter explained that the barriers of the mountains largely decided the paths of bird migration.

“Through the pass between the hills at Chattanooga and the broad valley leading northeastward from the city,” said Parter, “the birds swarm all through the months of April and May to distant points in Ontario, New York, and New England. Most of the Warblers have already passed on, some linger, and others remain permanently. Here are many other species, too, which are familiar to us at home; the Field Sparrow, the Red-eyed Vireo, and the Wood Pewee. Now, at last, we hear the famous Mockingbird in his own southern thicket.

He is a Quaker in coat of drab of irre-  
proachable cut. He sings in the hedge-  
row near us. His back is ashen gray, his wings brownish slate with a large white patch and a few white edgings, the throat and outer tail feathers are white, and the under parts brownish white. One can scarcely distinguish his notes from those of the Brown Thrasher until he works himself up into a passion of song in early spring, then, there is no comparison between the singers; he outdoes the Thrasher four-fold! It must be admitted he is always the imitator, yet he improves on the music of those he imitates;

**Mocking-  
bird**

it is a wild and lawless song with all sorts of jingles thrown in for which he makes no extra charge! The music is free, he gives you sample themes, but never rounds out one of them into a full-fledged song. His call note is a simple *jor-e-e-e*, and in themes he has nothing to offer you which are the equal of those of the Hermit Thrush. But his music is loved by all those in the south whose enviable privilege it is to hear it the year round. The Mocker breeds from British Columbia to northern Florida and Texas, but instances of its nesting in the northerly States are infrequent. The bird winters in the southern States. The nest is built in a tree or hidden in thick bushes or vines, and the eggs are greenish blue heavily speckled with a variety of browns. The female will begin to build in the latter part of March, a couple of weeks later the laying has begun, and early in May the eggs are hatched. Often the same pair of birds will raise a second brood which will be on the wing by the middle of August.

"A graceful bird and a near relative of the Mocker far more commonly distributed north and south than he, is the Brown Thrasher; he is a familiar character in the vicinity of Chattanooga and upon the old battlefield of Chickamauga; we heard him singing within the city limits and he is here among the trees beside the road. A large fellow with a tan-brown coat, two

**Brown  
Thrasher**



narrow white wing-bars, an extremely long brown tail, and pale buff under parts heavily blotched with sepia spots, he is often a conspicuous object perched nearly at the top of some roadside tree. He is fairly common throughout the warmer portions of New York and New England, and not infrequently visits our Pemigewasset Valley in the White Mountains. If you should ask me how his song differed from those of the Catbird and the Mockingbird which it strongly resembles I should say at once by its character of continuous repetition. Whatever he sings he is sure to repeat two or three times over with few exceptions. He takes himself to the top of the tree and addresses the world—or as much of it as his voice will reach. His head is erect, his long, slender bill is wide open, and he rattles away like a nervous orator throwing out disjointed sentences in stammering confusion. He advises the farmer to hasten and finish his job. *Pitch in, pitch in. Sow it, sow it, sow it, seed it down quickly-quickly, plough it, plough it, hoe it, hoe it, hoe it, push it in, push it in, weed it, weed it.* The old poet, Robert Browning, though he never saw or heard the American bird, expressed its characteristic love of repetition in song most cleverly:

“That’s the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture,

"The Thrasher is not a Thrush, but he is a near relative of that bird. His territory extends from Alberta, northern Michigan and southern Maine, south to Louisiana and northern Florida. He too, like the Mocker, winters in the southern States. The nest is built near the ground in thicket or tangled vine; within it are usually four, gray or blue-white eggs thickly speckled with cinnamon-brown. In the north the first eggs are laid between the middle of May and the first of June. The bird is very shy and does not allow you to approach very near.

"Now sings the Carolina Wren again, he is the largest and most powerful-voiced member of his family. There he is on an old log beside the road, head and tail erect, complaining, perhaps, to all the country round that his tea-kettle's gone! *Lost m'tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea!* I happen to hear this syllabic form very clearly, but Mr. Torrey hears, *Cheery, cheery, cheery, cheery*. It is really hard to tell sometimes whether a bird sings a two- or a three-syllabled song; there are often variations one way or another. That is exactly the case with the Maryland Yellowthroat, who sometimes sings *What a pity, what a pity, what a pity*, as well as *Witchery, witchery, witchery, witch*.

"The Carolina Wren is reddish brown with not very



Brown Thrasher



distinct sepia black bars or spots on wings and tail, there is a long buff-white eyebrow, dull white under the chin, and the under parts are ocher-buff. His territory comprises the region from Iowa to the Palisades opposite New York and the lower Connecticut River Valley, southward to the Gulf States. He is resident wherever found—in a word does not migrate. The bulky nest is composed of grasses, twigs, and leaves lined with cotton-grass and other soft material, and is lodged in a hole in an old tree or in the crevice of a rock. The eggs are white speckled with browns and madder-purple. Mr. Elon Howard Eaton has found this Wren as far east as Wood's Hole, Massachusetts, but I have never seen it farther north than the Palisades of the Hudson."

"Parter, what is that distant, loud call-note we hear every once in a while?" asked Boy Blue. "The bird can't be so very far away, yet you have not told me what it is." "Yes, I've had it in mind to tell you that was the Great-crested Flycatcher,"

responded Parter, "but one thing at a time, and now we are nearing him he shall have his share of attention. He is the noisiest member of the Flycatcher family, whose loud *Queep* outdoes the similar call of his northern relative, the Kingbird. He makes his home in the north as well as the south, but as you see now, he is

**Great-  
crested  
Flycatcher**

more of a woodsman than his more familiar relatives Phoebe and Chebec, for his shrill call comes from the patch of woods fully an eighth of a mile ahead of us. You will be sure to see him when we reach it as he will certainly occupy a conspicuous position near the top of a tree just as his cousin the little Chebec does—but he shouts and the Chebec utters a mere ‘snippy remark.’ He is a bit brighter in color than the rest of his tribe, though his attempt to be ‘gay’ does not amount to much; his coat and crested crown are olive, his throat and chest ashen gray, the wings brown and ruddy brown with white bars, the tail, especially below, is quite reddish, and the under parts a dull sulphur-yellow. The note of the Great-crest is like a college yell; when he arrives in the spring he would have the country all round know he is on the spot, or as the tradesman would say, ‘at the old stand.’ There he is now! on the dead twig at the topmost point of the oak tree silhouetted against the bright sky so you cannot see his colors very well, though with the aid of your glass you can detect the pale yellow of his lower breast. He and his mate are a queer pair, for some unknown reason they like to weave an old cast-off snake’s skin into the structure of the nest. I suppose they consider it useful building material and accept it with anything else that comes their way without questioning its character;



no doubt if it were a bit of old brown and gray silk dress that would be equally acceptable. It is absurd, I think, to suppose as some illogical people do, that the snake skin is deliberately chosen as a 'scarecrow' to frighten away the squirrel, the jay, or any other woodland robber of nests. This would argue that the bird possessed a reasoning faculty and thought some other fellow would be scared by a thing which had no terror for him! thus: Robber spies nest full of eggs—'My eye! what do I spy? Eggs! Lucky find. Haven't yet dined—Gracious sakes! Snakes! Not this time, Good-bye.' The nest is hidden in the hollow of an old tree, fifteen feet or so above the ground. The eggs are cream-yellow scrawled with marks of umber brown. This Flycatcher, as his name implies, captures his food on the wing; it mostly consists of the larger insects including June bugs and the like. His territory extends from New Brunswick and Ontario to the coast of the Gulf States. He winters from Florida to Central America.

"One of the most beautiful of the southern birds is the Summer Tanager. He is somewhere among these trees, as I hear his familiar *clipperty-clip* note. Be on the watch for an all-red bird about the color of the madder lake in my paint-box, a rosy red, not a scarlet, a color quite different from the vermilion hue of

**Summer  
Tanager**

the Scarlet Tanager, his cousin, with jet black wings and tail. Older Summer Tanagers are duller in color, resembling the so-called Venetian red. This fellow is distinctly southern and breeds from Florida to southern New Jersey, rarely wandering as far north as Long Island; but it is not a common species beyond Washington. Like his northern relative he frequents the open woods, and I think he is oftenest a dweller among the pines. He has a very characteristic call-note which Dr. Chapman translates into *Chicky-tucky-tuck*, a not very musical utterance of five distinct syllables. His song is a sweet, soft, disconnected warble, mostly in groups of several tones each, with the effect of five or six syllables. Where the Robin sings mostly in triplets and the Scarlet Tanager in doublets, this bird strings his tones together much as the Rose-breasted Grosbeak does. Listen! you can scarcely count the syllables. Aha! Boy Blue, you have found him, your eyes are keener than mine, and this time he perches in an oak, not in his customary pine tree. He is singing right at you; perhaps he says, 'Hear me, awaken! Bright as the sun above, clad in the rose's hue, song for my lady love, not for a boy like you, Parter's mistaken!' What? I never would have supposed so charming a singer would have gone back on a devoted bird-lover like yourself. Now, if you had

been a girl he would have sung a different song, of course. Mr. Torrey has remarked, he sings without the hoarseness of tone which characterizes the voice of his cousin the Scarlet Tanager, yet I hear the same burring tones from this bird as I do from the other, though it certainly is not so strong. The Summer Tanager's nest is built of shredded bark, twigs, and tendrils lined with softer materials. The three or four bluish, or blue-green eggs are covered with numerous olive-brown markings.

"Now we are approaching what I think is a resort of the Prothonotary or Golden Swamp Warbler, for I hear his unmistakable Sandpiper-like voice: *Peet sweet, peet sweet, peet tweet, tweet, tweet* among these willows beside the road. Sometimes, down in Louisiana, I am convinced he speaks French for I seem to hear him say: *Tout d'suite, tout d'suite, tout d'suite*, as though he were in a hurry and would settle the business on hand 'at once.' He is one of the most striking of the southern Warblers, a rich golden orange. Cypress swamps and sleepy, tangled lagoons of the Mississippi River are his favorite resorts, so this must be a solitary individual who has wandered beyond his dismal swamp. But there is no doubt about that note. Now keep your glass busy, Boy Blue, and tell me when you catch sight of a

**Prothono-  
tary  
Warbler**

golden, cadmium yellow bird, with dull olive-yellow back, gray wings, and tail and under parts of white. You will have to look sharp for he is an active and restless creature never more than a second or two in one spot. His voice is remarkably clear, a whistle quite unlike the high-pitched lisping notes of the other Warblers. There he is! now you have him and now you don't; this dodging about among the willows is like a game of tag with little or no chance for the chaser! but at least you have seen his gorgeous color."

"I would like very much to know what the long, queer name Prothonotary means," remarked Boy Blue, "It's a strange one for such a tiny bird."

"I can tell you its meaning," responded Parter, "but I do not know why it was applied to the bird. I can only guess at that. The scientific name is *Protonotary citrea*, or the yellow Prothonotary; *proto* is from the Greek and means first, and *notarius* is the Latin for notary, a clerk—the first notary or clerk of a court, or the chief secretary of the Pope's court. I presume that this secretary wore a yellow robe, though I am not sure of that; at any rate, the olden-time people of Louisiana were mostly French Catholics, and as one of the commonest birds of the Mississippi Valley was this Prothonotary Warbler, conspicuous on account of his beautiful yellow color, I suspect they named him for the secretary just as



GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET  
(above)

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER  
(below)



CARDINAL



they did the Cardinal Bird for the red-robed Papal Cardinal. However this may be, certainly the Prothonotary's costume is most beautiful, and his clear, ringing whistle is scarcely less so. He is the Prince of the southern woods. The nest is often lodged in the hollow stump of an old willow not very far from the watery swamp below; it is constructed of rootlets, moss, and plant down; the eggs within it are white thickly speckled with cinnamon-brown or chestnut-red. This Warbler's breeding ground extends from eastern Nebraska to central Delaware and southward to the Gulf States. It winters from Nicaragua to Venezuela.

"We have seen the handsome red-crested Cardinal before, to-day, and here he is again lustily singing his 'three cheers'—as some writer has it—

*creer, creer, creer*; his mate is beside

**Cardinal**

him clad in sober dove-gray garments and with dull reddish crest, wings, and tail. His colors are a bright, rosy scarlet—like a bit duller on the back, and deep red on the bill which is surrounded by a narrow black mask extending to the eyes and down over the chin. He is so beautiful and his song is so highly prized that long since he was captured and has become a well-known cage-bird. Not infrequently he appears unexpectedly in the southern part of New York State, especially Staten Island and Long Island.

His territory extends from there to Iowa and southward to the Gulf States; not being a migrant he remains through the year in the southern woodlands, especially in the dense thickets of swampy lands. You see, where he is now the ground is spongy and wet and there are many old willows. The nest is built of twigs, rootlets, shreds of bark, and moss, and is commonly hidden in some inaccessible thicket. The eggs are blue-white blotched with ruddy brown especially at the larger end.

“Now that we are talking about a bird dressed in red, look at yonder telegraph pole undergoing the closest inspection of a solitary Wood-  
**Red-headed** pecker. This one is the Red-headed,  
**Woodpecker** perhaps the most beautiful of his tribe.

What do you suppose he finds of interest on that bare pole? Maybe he is looking for the right spot to sound a rousing tattoo; he is making a few remarks, anyway, which may mean no *luck-k ker-r-r-r-ruck*, so it's possible he mistakes the pole for an old dead tree which harbors no grubs on its smooth sleek sides. What a chump he is! But no matter, he has his own ideas about telegraph poles and their use; evidently they do not serve woodpeckers as well as they do men. There he goes to the next pole—no grubs at home there, either, please apply to the next, and the next; what a waste of precious time!

“A splendid red-crimson head is his, one might with good reason call him a miniature Red Riding-hood. His back is a slaty or steely blue in the strong light, the wings and tail are blue-black, on the wing is a broad patch of white, and the under parts and tips of the tail-feathers are white. To a certain degree he suggests the national colors, red, white, and blue. He has a special liking for old dead trees and he is most frequently seen exploring their bare limbs in search of boring beetles; I have no doubt he finds this grubbing a paying occupation, so what wonder that he takes a chance with the bare telegraph pole, you can't be so sure it does not shelter a bug. He has the reputation of being fond of cherries and early apples, and in the fall of beech nuts and wild dried fruits. But on the whole he must be regarded a benefactor on the fruit farm for his destruction of insect life is very great. The nest is excavated anywhere from twelve to fifteen feet up in a dead trunk or limb; in the hole, about ten to fifteen inches deep, there will be about five white eggs. The Red-head is not exactly a southern species, but the likelihood of your finding it in any considerable numbers in New York or New England is not very great. On the other hand, it is rather plentiful in the Mississippi Valley and is fairly common in the south. It winters from Virginia to the Gulf Coast.

“There are a few house pigeons on the road, hereabouts, but I do not see the distinctly southern species called the Mourning Dove. I am sure it has been seen in this vicinity by Bradford Torrey, but it is more likely to be found in numbers farther south. The head of this dove is a blue, slate color, the sides of the neck are iridescent, the back brownish gray, and the tail banded gray and black. The range of this pigeon is from Ontario and Quebec southward to the Gulf Coast; it frequents many of the southern towns and we may yet see it in the streets of Chattanooga. The name is derived from its peculiar slow, soft, and sad cooing; but that is by no means a funeral chant, quite the contrary, it is part of a song and dance performance in which Mr. Dove, the gay cavalier bobs his head up and down, waltzes round, and talks moonshine to his lady-love! The Mourning Dove visits the grain and corn fields in the autumn, and also any old gravel pit or sand-pile handy, with special consideration for his gizzard’s requirements. A gizzard, you know, is a hard and grinding task-master of the stomach if you happen to be a bird!

“There is a red-breasted fellow which we are hearing now that I might call a ‘brick of a bird’ in the fullest sense of the term—the Orchard Oriole. After meet-



The frail nest of the Mourning Dove in a beech bole

From a photograph by H. W. Weisgerber





ing the Red-headed Woodpecker his color seems dull and ordinary, yet he is dressed in the best of taste; neat but not gaudy as the old saying goes. His coat is glossy black, his chest and lower back a brick or chestnut

**Orchard  
Oriole**

red, the tail black, the wings black with whitish edgings, and on the shoulders a patch of chestnut. His mate is a dull light yellowish olive. I wish you might see the two together, they make a pretty pair with something of refinement in their sober coloring. You will scarcely hear a better singer than the Orchard Oriole though his gift is not as great as that of the Thrush. His notes—some of them like those of the 'Baltimore'—are strung together and resemble the warble of the Purple Finch, but many are in groups of three like those of the Robin. This Oriole is not exclusively southern, you will sometimes see him in the vicinity of New York City, and occasionally in western Massachusetts; but he is really not common beyond the southern limits of New Jersey or of Ohio. His territory extends from Massachusetts to North Dakota and southward to the Gulf Coast. He winters from southern Mexico to Colombia and Venezuela. Caterpillars, rose bugs, and beetles are the chief of his diet.

“Still another voice which comes to us from the thickets beside the mill-pond we are approaching

betrays the presence of a yellow bird not altogether southern but at least rare, like the Orchard Oriole, north of New York City. It is the chatter of the Yellow-breasted Chat which we hear. He is a Warbler, and the largest of the family, considerably separated in character from the other members of his tribe. He is a pretty fellow with a cadmium yellow breast, an olive-green coat, white under parts, a white band over the eye extending to the bill, another short one on the under lid, and a small area of black in front of and below the eyes. What he has to say is more of meaningless gabble than music. With every word he jerks himself about as if addressing each green leaf in his vicinity, or some particular individual of an imaginary audience, with a—*Cop! scuttle! chuck it! scoot! git!*—and more of that sort of thing. It may be intended as friendly advice to some little scalawag who is chased by policeman for stealing apples. *Char-r-r-r*, he scolds, and while you are wondering what under the sun he is scolding about he suddenly catches sight of you, the strange rigmarole comes to an end, and away he darts into the depths of the thicket scattering a few protesting *chucks* on the way! On the wing he is scarcely less odd; with legs a-dangling, his flight teetering, zig-zaged, and accompanied by a medley of whistles,

chucks, and chortlings, you are sure, as the Scotchmen would express it, he has 'gone clean daft!' The nest of this Warbler is a loosely woven, dried-grass structure lined with soft materials, and lodged in a tangle of vines and bushes not far up from the ground; it will contain about four white eggs well speckled with reddish brown.

"One of the relatives of the Chickadee, a quite southern species is a little woodland character whose loud, monotonously whistled *Peto, peto, peto*, you now hear coming from the trees bordering the crossroad we are approaching, it is the Tufted Titmouse, and he will keep

**Tufted  
Titmouse**

that *Peto* going for a half-hour at a time. We heard this note on Missionary Ridge when we took our first trip over there. He is a little leaden gray-coated fellow with a perky topknot, blackish forehead, rusty sides, and dull white under parts. Occasionally he appears on Staten Island and Long Island, but he is not a frequent visitor to regions as far north as that, and I have never seen him in Connecticut although his range includes that State; it extends from there to Nebraska and southward to the Gulf Coast; farther south he does not go. The nest is usually lodged in the deserted hole of a Woodpecker, it is built of leaves, shredded bark, and moss lined with cotton down, hairs, and feathers. There

are five to eight cream-white eggs flecked with reddish brown.

“You will notice as we approach this farmhouse there are many Swallows flying about, these are

**Purple  
Martin**

Purple Martins—not a bit purple, of course, for the one who named the bird must have been, as many men unfortunately are, more or less color blind. I think I see him over yonder occupying the porch of his own summer residence, a four-gabled, white house specially built for him, possibly, by some very considerate and humane citizen of Chattanooga. He is not altogether a southern bird, but is very common in most of the towns of the south; rarely you would see him as far north as our home in the Pemigewasset Valley of the White Mountains. Indeed, I know of but one little colony anywhere near us and that is in Plymouth. The Martin is a member of the Swallow family and cheerfully sets up housekeeping about the first of May in one of the many bird-houses in the land north or south which is left for him after the wicked and arrogant English Sparrow has taken his pick. The Martin apparently is convinced in his own mind that the chief occupation of Man is the building of bird-houses for his especial benefit, but the Sparrow has a contrary opinion and assumes that the wide, wide world and all there is in it—

particularly America—was solely intended for him; naturally, therefore, there is a good deal of scrapping about bird-houses! But I'm glad to say the Martin generally comes out on top though the Sparrow hectors the life out of him by constant intrusion in his family affairs. However, the Martin bravely succeeds in fighting him off, though the worst of it is, the Sparrows are apt to be on the ground and take possession before the Martins arrive in the spring.

“There is one southern bird we have not had the good fortune to meet in this locality, that is Chuck-will's-widow; if we were in Florida we would certainly make his acquaintance there. He is a bird of the night, a near relative of the Whippoorwill, and like that bird is much of a nuisance about the time you would like to go to sleep. In habits and appearance he is similar to the Whippoorwill in many respects, but he has no distinct, white crescent across the upper breast, and possesses hairlike branches to the stiffened bristles set about his bill not possessed by his relative. His northern limit is North Carolina and Illinois.

**Chuck-  
will's-  
Widow**

His note has four distinct syllables and I interpret it, *Struck-whip-willow, struck-whip-willow, struck-whip-willow, struck-whip-willow*, whistled as many times as you have breath to hold out. Hence his name

Chuck-will's-widow; but I am willing to leave it to anyone's keen ears that the last syllable celebrates the willow tree! I never measured the mouth of this charming night singer, but they say it has an expanse of two inches, and that Humming Birds and Sparrows have run foul of it and have sunk to the depths of the capacious stomach below. It would have served the old gormandizer right if the sharp bill of the Hummer had paid him back with a violent and fatal case of appendicitis! He should have confined himself to his proper diet, moths and flying insects of all kinds.

There is a Sparrow Hawk flying overhead. We may know him by his whistled *Killy, killy, killy, killy*. He is our smallest, perhaps prettiest Hawk, not over ten inches in length, with beautiful, large black eyes, a bill as sharp as a pair of scissors, a gray head capped with a small patch of brown, dark gray wings, a rusty brown back barred with black, a rusty tail finishing with a band of gray edged with white, buffy and cream under parts, and sides lightly black-spotted. That is quite a stylish combination of colors. He chooses the bare limb of a dead tree for his outlook, and awaits the approach of such modest game as grasshoppers, moths, butterflies, and mice; sometimes, but not very often, he captures small

**Sparrow  
Hawk**



birds. But it is on record that his most successful captures are insects and mice. The nest is usually built in a woodpecker's deserted hole; it will contain from four to seven buff or ruddy-toned eggs blotched with various shades of brown. This picturesque little Falcon breeds from Mackenzie to Newfoundland and southward to Georgia and Texas. It winters from Illinois and Massachusetts to Costa Rica.

Certainly one of the commonest Warblers of this locality appears to be the becomingly dressed Kentucky. Yet he is one of the very rare species at the northerly limit of his range which is from Nebraska to southern

**Kentucky  
Warbler**

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and the lower Valley of the Hudson; southward he inhabits the wide region between Alabama and eastern Texas. He winters from Chiapas and Tabasco to Colombia, South America. His coloring is very simple, and Mr. Torrey's description of it is nearly perfect; 'clothed in lustrous olive and the most gorgeous of yellows with trimmings of black,' he says, 'all in the best of taste, with nothing patchy, nothing fantastic or even fanciful.' But he forgot about the long yellow eyebrow passing from the bill completely around back of the eye. That's what a boy would call 'some eyebrow!' Then he has decidedly black cheeks! Well,

I suppose that really isn't fantastic for a bird or a clown in the circus; but probably Mr. Torrey would admit it was for a Fifth Avenue swell! Mr. Kentucky is just at present in one of his favorite haunts, the well-wooded border of a swamp. If you could see him on the ground you would discover that he does not hop, but walks as the Ovenbird does. I know of but one form of his song which is rhythmically like that of the Maryland Yellow-throat or the Carolina Wren; it is in a series of three syllables: *Tee-we-o, tee-we-o, tee-we-o, tee-wee*, a loud clearly whistled song which he repeats every ten seconds or so. Sometimes it has been likened to *Cleer-wee, cleer-wee, cleer-wee*, but even then, it is a question whether you would make this form a two- or three-syllabled one. The nest of this Warbler is placed on or near the ground in a tangle of briars or brush; it is bulky and made up of twigs, rootlets, old leaves and grass lined with finer rootlets and horse-hair. The four or five eggs are white blotched with lilac or sienna-brown often crowded in a wreath about the larger end. The nesting, according to locality, dates from the end of May to the middle of June.

"The Wood Thrush is singing along with the Kentucky Warbler in the woods just beyond the swampy meadow. We have heard him in various parts of the country during our journey. He is the common



KENTUCKY WARBLER



southern form of the Thrush just as the Hermit is the northern form. He is familiar to us in the suburbs of New York, in Englewood, New Jersey, and in the Highlands of the Hudson, but his visits to the White Mountain region are rare indeed. Mr. Horace Wright has observed the bird for a succession of years in Jefferson Highlands, where a colony is established on Boy Mountain, but I have only one record of him in the Pemigewasset Valley, and that was away back in the year 1884. Here in the South, however, and generally in the cooler woods, this Thrush is quite common. His color is a warm cinnamon-brown grading to light olive-brown toward the tail, the under parts are a creamy white, and quite large, roundish, sepia spots cover the breast well down. His song is flute-like, soft and sweet, very deliberate, and always, or very nearly always, composed of what one may call triplets, that is, three notes which you may pick out at the piano in almost any position relatively with one another provided they are from about three to six tones apart. Often the bird vibrates on the third, or an added fourth note, which sounds to my ear something like the rippling ring the blacksmith produces upon the anvil with his hammer between the blows dealt upon the red-hot horseshoe. A golden voice is his which

**Wood  
Thrush**

matches charmingly with the molten gold and ruby tints of a sunset sky, every note a jewel brightly shining while the day is dying. The northern limit of this thrush is South Dakota, Minnesota, and central New Hampshire; his breeding ground extends southward to the Gulf Coast.

"Come, we must join the automobile now, it is growing late, and you are tired with your long walk, we have yet several miles to ride before we reach Chattanooga. But while we ride you may read to me your completed list of birds including those we met in West Virginia and Maryland."

Boy Blue produced his memorandum book and read as follows: "Bob-white, Sparrow Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Kingfisher, Red-headed, Downy, and Hairy Woodpeckers, Flicker, Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Crested Flycatcher, Phoebe, Wood Pewee, Blue Jay, Crow, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, English Sparrow, Goldfinch, Chippy, Field Sparrow, Chewink, Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Purple Martin, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos, Black and White, Golden Winged, Parula, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Myrtle, Magnolia, Prothonotary, Chestnut-sided, Blackpoll, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Prairie, and Kentucky Warblers, Ovenbird, Mary-



land Yellow-throat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Redstart, Mockingbird, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Wood Thrush, Robin, and Bluebird."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WARBLERS

“THE month of May is the best time to study the so-called Warblers,” said Parter at breakfast one morning, “and while we are here in Boston we will choose the Arnold Arboretum for our hunting-ground. I have arranged to take the car as soon as we have our oatmeal, bacon, and eggs, and we will try fisherman’s luck with the worm in the bill of the bird instead of on the end of the hook! No doubt, out there among the trees and shrubs where the wild cherries and the lilacs are in bloom, we will find many a Warbler, Yellow and Chestnut-sided doing his own fishing, not with, but for the worm. Then, in the more secluded shadows of Hemlock Hill there will probably be the Black-throated Green singing about trees or other things, and the buzzing Blackburnian, gorgeous in his uniform of black and gold, flashing his beautiful colors in the broken sunlight. Also, in the thin woodlands beyond, I think we may discover the sedate Golden-wing and the flippant Prairie with some other interesting family connections.”

Accordingly, quite early in the course of the morning, the automobile arrived at the entrance to the Arboretum, that remarkable park where trees and shrubs from all parts of the world have been gathered together, and Parter with his grandson and a few chosen, eager young companions, began a tour of inspection which left no branch or twig uncovered by their bird glasses. On every hand among the commoner birds were flitting numberless Warblers recently arrived from the sunny regions of the Gulf States, the islands of the Caribbean Sea, or perhaps from the coast of South America far beyond.

"Now, the Wood Warblers," continued Parter, "embrace a large family of tiny birds which almost exclusively frequent the tops of trees or else the depths of the shrubbery, and are seldom seen on the ground. These little fellows are ever restlessly fluttering amid the delicate, fresh green foliage of early summer in a busy search for the grub and worm. They are called soft-billed birds as they possess very slender, delicate beaks adapted to the destruction of silky cocoons and not to grubbing for food in sandy and gravelly soil; not but what the Warbler is occasionally seen on the ground; he is, but it is not his natural place any more than the bough of a tree is the place to look for the Whippoorwill. The frail bill of the Warbler would be easily smashed

to pieces if used as the Sparrow uses his hard and horny one.

“These Warblers, also, are especially American; you do not find them in the Old World. There are other distinct characters of the family, too, which you would do well to remember. Their plumage is full of variety and is often very fanciful, and their notes are pitched higher in the musical scale than those of any other species save the Creeper and Waxwing. As a rule nearly all their songs would go on record above the final high C of the pianoforte, and strangest of all their peculiarities is the fact that in times of migration they travel almost exclusively at night and are the chief victims of the lighthouses and electric lights; doubtless, they travel at night to escape the danger of attack from larger birds. Moreover, their summer and winter homes are often separated by thousands of miles, and their incessant activity is a wonder to all who study their habits. Fearlessness, too, is not least of their extraordinary characteristics, for I know of no other species which will allow the cautious and gentle bird student to approach the nest and actually stroke the back of the brooding female; but that has been frequently done. There are about fifty species which visit the eastern United States, but of these there is only a score which you are likely to meet.

"The Black-throated Green is one of the most interesting birds of the family and is fairly common through the thin evergreen woods of the northern States. His song is most likely to catch your ear in a group of young hemlocks and pines. He is a tiny bird scarcely over five inches in length, and he does not appear to be even as long as that. His back is olive-green, his throat an intense black, the face and sides of his head are bright yellow, and there are two white bars on each wing. Frank Bolles calls him a bird rich in spring tints of yellow and tender green. Different listeners have several ways of expressing the burden of his song, though the rhythm is subject to some variation it is not seriously altered. One says he sings *Trees, trees, murm'ring trees*, another, *Cheese, cheese, a little more cheese*, yet another, *Sleep, sleep, pretty one sleep*, and still another, *'Tis, 'tis, 'tis, sweet here*. Then, in a Norway Spruce on the grounds of the Harvard Astronomical Observatory I have heard him sing what seemed to me like *Sweeping skies with a spy-glass!* an extension of the usual song of five syllables to one of seven. The Warblers scarcely confine themselves to any one fixed form of song, but the sum of their notes is very nearly the same in all songs. Just as two quarters, two dimes, and a nickel

**Black-  
throated  
Green  
Warbler**

are equal in value to one quarter, four dimes, and two nickels, so the sum of the notes in each song of the Black-throated Green is approximately the same. This may be rather a difficult point for you to take in, but nevertheless it is an important one in the understanding of bird music. You will certainly notice one other thing about this Warbler's song; the next to the last note is commonly lower than all the others and it possesses a buzzing tone. It is the five-note song we are hearing now with the next to the last note buzzed. This Hemlock Hill on which we stand is precisely such an evergreen-clothed slope as the Black-throated Green likes. The nest will be high up in one of these hemlocks or spruces, and in it you would see four little olive-brown-spotted white eggs which are not laid much before the end of the first week in June. We are on an incline looking down into a group of shrubbery which is full of Warblers of several kinds; it may be difficult to unravel the various songs you hear, but that is to be expected, for one cannot learn the Warbler's songs in one hearing any more than one can master the English language in a month's time. This Black-throated Green will go singing cheerily on his way to Canada and far Alberta; a broad breeding ground is his from Long Island to that distant point. He winters in Mexico and Central America.





Black-poll Warbler



“The Myrtle Warbler, which we have met before, is still singing in the shrubbery at the foot of the hill. His notes, figuratively speaking, run up the mountain and the last one pitches off into the valley. On the branch of the tree beside us I can see a Blackpoll; his notes are monotonously fixed on one key, but they are sharply staccato; like the snipping of scissors each is cut off from the other, the tones increase in volume as they go, and finally die away in a soft but abrupt diminuendo. His cap is black, his back gray and black, the cheeks, under parts and two wing-bars white, and there is more or less streakiness in black and white on the sides. The breeding ground of this Warbler is altogether north of central New England and it extends away to the very limit of trees in Alaska and Labrador. We may frequently discover him on our higher mountain tops, in fact, this particular little fellow may be on the way to one of them now. I do not call him a common bird by any means, but you are likely to find him anywhere you go in the season of migration. His nest is also among the evergreens. In spring the female is a distinct olive-gray in tone, the four eggs are grayish white speckled with a variety of browns. To give you an idea of the pitiable number of Warblers destroyed in the period of their migrations, it is on record that no less than three hundred

**Blackpoll  
Warbler**

and fifty six Blackpolls were found dead at the base of Fire Island Lighthouse, killed by striking it on the night of September 23, 1887. The Fire Islands are directly south of Penataquit, Long Island.

“The Redstart, who is singing this morning in every other shrub we pass, is a black bird with bright patches of salmon-scarlet on the sides of his breast, the middle of the wings and base of the tail. The black bill has bristles at the base. This little fellow is in sharp color contrast with the rest of his Warbler relatives not one of which can match his superb ebony hue. The female’s coloring is a mixture of olive-gray and brown-olive with patches of pale gold ocher replacing the salmon-scarlet of the male. The nest is a beautifully circled, neat little structure woven of plant down, fine shreds of bark and thin gray grasses, lodged well up in the Y branch of a small tree; it usually contains four dull white or pale green-blue eggs with specks and blotches of cinnamon brown, lilac, and umber. This warbler is in his ideal surroundings amongst the tangled shrubbery, darting about, strutting hither and thither with tail spread like a fan, and with wings a-droop; it is his habit to be doing that. He is anxious for you to know there is no bird whose costume is as bright and showy as his, and he is twice as lively in his efforts to display



Blackburnian Warbler



Black-throated Green Warbler



Black-throated Blue Warbler

Yellow Warbler



his personal charms as the Blackpoll ever thought of being under any circumstances. The Redstart begins its nest-building much earlier than the Blackpoll, and I have no doubt he and his mate will build their home somewhere about the end of May. His song is a little string of five lisping notes in monotone the last one of which is dragged down abruptly a few tones below the others, the pitch is high and the interval is quite indefinite.

“On the ground there among the ferns not far from where you are sitting is a Black-throated Blue; he hears not only my voice but those of each one of you and he is not a bit disturbed or worried. Indeed, I believe he is curious enough to come over and investigate the meaning of your various lisping imitations of his voice. The Warblers are not a bit timid and if one keeps very quiet they will not in the least mind your being quite near. This fellow is very soldierly in a neat uniform of cadet blue and black with white trimmings. His back is deep gray-blue, the cheek, throat, and sides black, and on the wing is a broad band of white, also there are white markings on the tail. His song, as you hear it now for yourselves is the very simplest, uninteresting repetition of the alphabetical Z. Imitate it closely and he may come nearer; the notes are four or five, not more. With

**Black-  
throated  
Blue  
Warbler**

great deliberation they creep up the scale in a gradual crescendo and finish as one's voice does in questioning, on a higher pitch. Here he comes, nearer and nearer, the spirit of curiosity and adventure takes possession of him, yet he approaches cautiously and maybe, with an attempted indifference; now he is by your shoe, Boy Blue; he thinks some other bird may be under your cap, he will pick at a suspected insect on your stocking as he goes, now he is quizzing your knee-buckle—no, that is insufficiently buglike to tempt him! but he may find something near you on the ground; he is still insisting that Z is the all-important letter of the alphabet, or perhaps the only—good gracious! that good-for-nothing Hummer! He has frightened him away—what a vicious lunge he made at him. Perhaps it was half play, but at any

**Humming-  
bird**

rate, that's just like the Hummingbird he always was a scrapper, ready to fight anything in the world, and rely on his lightning-like wings to get him out of threatening disaster. He will pick a quarrel with one of his own kind or any other kind he happens to think may contribute to his pugnacious entertainment. That disturber of the peace has spoiled our little tête-à-tête with the Black-throated Blue, but there are other days to come, and you are likely to meet him again somewhere else. The nest of this Warbler is near

the ground, usually amongst the brushwood of a clearing; the little eggs are gray-white thickly spattered with brown at the larger end.

“One of our commonest Warblers hereabouts is the Chestnut-sided; he is singing above our heads at the present moment in the birches and you

will hear him in nearly every tree that borders the road winding through the park. He is beautifully marked; a

**Chestnut-  
sided  
Warbler**

yellow cap, black cheeks, a mixed black, yellow, and white coat, white breast on the sides of which is a broad stain of rusty or chestnut red, a black tail and wings, and two dull white wing-bars. It is a variegated costume, distinctly different from that of any other warbler, so it is easily recognized. His song is simple, with few variations. I think he pokes fun at children who are fond of chewing-gum: *Chew-it, chew-it, chew-it, chew-it-you!* he sings and you are sure he has caught you with your jaws working. Then again, someone else suggests he stammeringly calls on a certain Miss Beecher, thus: *I wish, I wish, I wish t'see-Miss-Beecher!* and still another interpreter adds, *Tsee, tsee, tsee, pleased-to-meet-you.* At any rate one can count from four to seven notes in the song, the last two or three of which are rapidly delivered. This spritely little Warbler arrives early in May, chooses the edge of the woodland, the

pasture, or the quiet roadside for his home, and nests there about the twentieth of the month among the tangle of briars, vines, bushes, or slash, not very far above the ground. The nest is a careless affair rather shabbily built for a Warbler's work. In it there are generally four cream white, brown spotted eggs. The bird breeds from Saskatchewan and Manitoba south to Rhode Island and east Nebraska, and through the mountains to Tennessee and South Carolina; it winters in the tropics.

“Not far from our Chestnut-sides, down in the shrubbery below him sings the Maryland Yellow-throat; he is quite as common, and he evidently likes Massachusetts and New Hampshire quite as well as the State for which he is named. He is forever asking questions in an unmusical and very loud voice for so small an individual. *Which is it, which is it, which is it, which?* or, *Which way, sir, which way, sir, which way, sir, which?* or again, this three-syllabled form is sometimes interpreted, *Witchery, witchery, witchery, witch.* But what he is singing now sounds like a fair warning to somebody not to do something, no one knows what: *Do it! don't you do it, don't you do it, don't you do it, don't.* Other Yellow-throats in other places may have something still different to say. Those in the vicinity of New York, Dr. Chapman

**Maryland  
Yellow-  
throat**



Bay-breasted Warbler

Chestnut-sided Warbler



Maryland Yellow-throat  
(above)

Oven-bird  
(below)



thinks, sing, *You, you, I beseech you, I beseech you, I beseech you, I beseech.* This Warbler's home is commonly in the thicket, scarcely beside the road where he is now; but there is a brook here gurgling between the bushes and that is especially what he likes. The brook, the Catbird, and the Yellow-throat are always associated in my mind with one another, they are almost inseparable companions, yet you never find the Warbler very near the Catbird, he gives him a wide berth—they do not quarrel. Though the Maryland Yellow-throat is as strikingly marked as any of the Warblers he has not the variety of coloring which distinguishes the Chestnut-side, or the Parula. He wears a black mask which extends across the eyes and well down back of them, the upper edge of this is ashen white, his coat and tail are olive green, and from the throat downward over the underparts he is bright yellow. The nest is built upon the ground or near it in the tangled brushwood, or, not infrequently in a low bush. It generally contains four shiny white eggs speckled with a variety of browns. The nest-building begins about the last week of May, and is finished in six days' time. This Warbler is more southern in distribution than many of the others; its range is from Ontario and southern Labrador southward to the Gulf States. It winters from South Carolina to Guatemala, and

there is no essential reason why it should bear the name of the State of Maryland. That was occasioned by one of those ornithological discoveries which is without interest for most of us.

“If we move over to the little knoll of white birches beyond and off the road, we will be entertained by the “Teacher” as the Ovenbird is called. The first thing of interest you will notice about him is his walk! Other birds may hop, but he, with the appropriate dignity of a school teacher—whom we dub a pedagogue because in Roman days the teacher walked with, and led, his scholars—sedately walks! Behold him then, stalking along the birchen limb unmindful of us though we are but twenty feet away. He is naturally attracted to the birch tree; most of the school teachers of our grandfather’s days were too—I wonder why? Though there is no mention of the birchen rod in Oliver Goldsmith’s *Deserted Village*, no doubt the learned schoolmaster in it made his scholars walk in a straight line by its aid, else why—

**Oven-  
bird**

“Full well the busy whisper circling round  
Convey’d the dismal tidings when he frowned.”

Now, here he is transformed into a bird walking on the birch. Wonderful! and, as if to convince you of the fact, he raises a rousing, college yell with his

bill up in the air: TEACHÉR, TEACHÉR, TEACHÉR, TEACHÉR, TEACH-! beginning pianissimo and ending fortissimo; there is the swish of a slender, supple birchen twig to it, and possibly he would go for you if you did not learn your three R's promptly! I say it is a *yell*, for he calls at the top of his lungs, and you would never suspect so small a creature possessed such a voice. You can hear, too, a perfectly evident accent upon the second syllable '*cher*.' Much is written about a very beautiful song which he sings in flight, but I fail in finding anything extraordinary about that except a certain nervous exuberance or mirthfulness. He rises in the air, lets out a flood of jingling notes, musical as Warbler's songs go, and subsides with a few badly winded '*teachers*'; still insistent upon his profession, you see. He is called the Ovenbird because the nest is hidden in a sort of half-tunnel among the leaves and grass of rough woodlands. It is difficult to find, it is said, but to my mind not greatly so if you know how, where, and when to look for it. The bird has built its ovenlike home away up in New Hampshire in our little grove of birches for several years in succession. The nest is set up rather sideways, with an arch of grasses, twigs and old leaves overhead; it is well hidden in a tangle beside an old log, and holds about four cream white, speckled eggs,

but you would not see them before the latter part of May or the first of June. This Warbler's coloring is a light brownish olive green above, white beneath with a brown spotted breast, and gold ocher on the crown margined with sepia black. Unfortunately he has been called the Golden-crowned Thrush, a great mistake, for the name is misleading, and though the bird may be somewhat thrushlike in appearance it is entirely unrelated to the Thrush family.

"There is another Warbler not far off whose presence is made known by his song, though I do not catch sight of him yet; we will skirt these birches and work our way through the tangled shrubbery toward the group of young spruces over there about a stone's throw away. What I hear is the note of the Black-burnian, and nearer by, the song of the Blue-headed

**Blue-headed Vireo** or Solitary Vireo; you may catch a glimpse of the latter in the upper boughs of the beech on our left; now he is slowly hopping on a lower branch in the sunlight, you have a fine opportunity to see his slate-blue cap and white eye-ring which connects with the bar of white extending to the bill; none of the other Vireos possess that particular mark. His back is olive-gray, the wings and tail are a bit darker, there are two distinct white wing-bars, some little white edging on the upper feathers of the wings, the throat

and lower parts are white, and the sides are stained with pale green-yellow. I consider him the most attractive-appearing of all the six Vireos and one of the sweetest singers of the tribe. He is far from uncommon in the evergreen woodlands of our Pemigewasset Valley, we hear him there in late May and all through June, then, in early September he pipes up again and shortly after is heard no more. Listen to the swing of his loud, emphatic but sweet notes; one can scarcely call such music song, it is too fragmentary and interrupted—but so, also, is the music of the Red-eye. Neither bird sings a continuous song; this Solitary is more deliberate than the other fellow, he is surprised and disturbed to find you have discovered his snug retreat. *Dear me!* he calls, *You here? I'm surprised, greatly shocked, please go 'way.* Yet he is not so very timid, he sees you but does not fly away. A bird of the woods, he seldom appears in the village, but prefers the retirement of the scattered spruces, hemlocks, and birches of the upland. The nest, composed of tiny twigs, pine needles, and the cottony down of plants, is woven in the forked branch of a birch or beech, not many feet from the ground; it generally holds three or four thickly spotted white eggs which will be found not much before the second week of June. There is always a fair chance of your hearing this Vireo sing

in thin woodlands which are always frequented by many of the Warblers, even at points as high as three thousand feet among the hills. His territory extends from Alberta, southern Michigan, Quebec, and Cape Breton Island, southward to North Dakota, New England, and the mountains of Pennsylvania. He winters as far south as Guatemala.

Here is the surprise of the hour! for yonder on the trunk of the oak is the Brown Creeper, a transient visitor in these parts, doubtlessly on his way to the cooler regions of the far north. The edge of the deeper woods where the spruces and firs crowd together is the limiting line for most bird life, yet just there begins this tiny Creeper's life-zone in which he works at his nearly always solitary task of inspecting every inch of a tree trunk on some wild and lonely mountain slope at least fifteen hundred feet above sea level. That, I might add, is about the lowest point on his native heath where we should expect to meet his hermit-like Highness who is monarch, indeed, of the bleak wooded mountain regions of the north country. He is present on our higher mountain trails—those in King's and Tuckerman's Ravines, in the White Mountains, for example—and on the wooded slopes of the greater Green, Adirondack, and Catskill peaks; but he cannot be called common in any sense of the



word on a single one of them. Liking the cool, shady mountainside and finding on it plenty of food suited to his taste he often stays on through the winter; but the greater number of the birds pass northward to Canada. He is well named for he creeps spirally over the tree trunks, clinging close to the bark at any and all angles with the perpendicular. He is on his tour of spiral investigation now beginning at or near the base of the oak and working upward until he reaches the topmost boughs. His life is one of eternal vigilance. With his spiky tail for a helping brace he progresses upward, halting for a moment here and there as he discovers and devours some insect hidden in a crevice of the bark. His weak, squeaky notes are not heard at any distance; a deliberate and wiry *We-see, wis-sy*, informs you that the eyes of his family are open to all the possibilities of grubs and bugs, but all you hear is a fine lisping tone not unlike that of the Waxwing. He happens to be a solitary Creeper just at present, but usually in the spring season of migration he is likely to appear in companies of a score or more in many of our more northern villages. The nest of the Brown Creeper is generally hidden in the wide crevice of a long, half-loosened strip of bark; bits of old wood, grasses, and a lining of soft plant-down form its general make-up. The five or six eggs, laid in May, are white, encircled at the larger end

with many spots of cinnamon brown. This Creeper's colors are distinctly protective, and if he were perfectly quiet you would never suspect you saw more than a small hump on the tree trunk. The head and back are mottled and striped with brown, gray, and ocher yellow, the lower back is reddish brown, the underparts gray-white, and a band of pale buff marks the wing halfway down; the brown bill is very slender and considerably curved. He spends the winter from New York to the Gulf Coast.

"The notes that I heard so clearly a few minutes ago, were those of the Blackburnian Warbler. In

**Blackburnian Warbler** the borders of the spruce and hemlock forests of the north one is likely to have a good chance of meeting this gem of all the tribe, and we have that opportunity now in this group of spruces and hemlocks. There he is in the upper branch of that Colorado spruce, a flashing little sprite of a bird in golden vest and black and white jacket, a uniform fit for a fairy Prince! His neck and breast are brilliant in fiery cadmium-orange, one of the most beautiful colors of my paint-box. His song, though its tones are penetrating, is a wiry, thin performance scarcely worth notice from a musical point of view. He is more satisfactory to the artist than to the musician, yet the song has a distinct character all its own. My good old friend of years

ago, Bradford Torrey, writes it, *Zillup*, *zillup*, *zillup*, *zip-zip*, which I think as a syllabic form cannot be improved upon, though if I were to sweeten it with *Syrup*, *syrup*, *syrup*, *zi-zi-zi* it might be a bit more attractive! But certainly the letter Z is the most important one in this bird's alphabet; that is well worth remembering, and although his rhythmic varies somewhat and you will sometimes hear him sing *Tzee-vi*, *tzee-vi*, *tzee-vi*, *tz-z-z*, in general you can rely on the double syllables of the first, and the single syllables of the last half of the song. Besides the golden orange of his neck the coloring of the upper parts is slaty black with white edgings to the feathers, the wings are marked with a broad white patch, and the lower parts are graded from the golden orange of the neck through gold yellow into cream white on the abdomen. The term golden orange, as I use it, is the color of the orange skin which is not true orange but is much yellower in tone. There is, however, a dilute form of straight orange in the red coloring of the Redstart. The nest of the Blackburnian is a neat and compact little structure located from ten to thirty feet up in an evergreen tree—most often a hemlock. The eggs are a pearly gray-white flecked with olive and brown on the larger end. The nesting season begins about the last week in May.

“This Warbler breeds from Manitoba to Cape

Breton Isand and southward to the uplands of Connecticut, central Minnesota, and along the Alleghanies to Georgia and North Carolina. It winters from Yucatan to Peru. In the spring season of migration you will not infrequently see his colors flashing on the lawn, in the blossoming fruit trees, and in the early leafing shrubbery. You discover him with tail spread out like a fan, wings a-droop, and head cocked backward strutting proudly to attract the attention of the other bird! He is very tame and allows you to come quite near his place of feeding, but like most of the Warblers he is very restless and flutters hither and thither in tireless search of the wicked grub. If he were only quiet among those spruces for an instant you might get a 'snap shot' of him, but the Warblers are very unaccommodating in this respect, and like time and the tides, wait for no man. But what would his picture amount to without his gorgeous golden colors?

"Look sharp now and you will see another beautiful little fellow, the Northern Parula, flitting about near the Blackburnian. It is not easy to catch these

**Northern Parula** Warblers with your bird-glass, and as a baseball player would say, 'on the fly'; yet if your glass is in focus you will easily distinguish a coral necklace encircling the Parula's throat! That is his particular ornament

not shared by the female bird. His colors are a light slaty blue with a greenish tinge midway on the back, a bright yellow on the throat fading toward the breast, over that the dark red of the coral beads, and slate gray with two broad bars of white on the wings. This bird is a common summer resident of the woods on the lower slopes of our White Mountains, where you can hear him sing so late as the latter part of July. He is always in migratory passage in the vicinity of Boston, where he first appears about May 4th. His song is a poor, lisping, high-pitched effort at music located two full tones beyond the highest C of the pianoforte; a mere delicate thread of sound composed of three longer accented notes succeeded by three shorter and more rapid ones which rise a little higher than the others. It is sometimes written *Pet-sè, pet-sè, pet-sè, pe-se-se*. The Parula is a familiar summer dweller in the moist or swampy sections of the Adirondack and White Mountain woods where you will find the trees draped with gray *Usnea* moss. The pocketlike nest is usually located well up in a spruce, hemlock, or fir tree, completely concealed in a large bunch of the moss which is a common decoration of these trees in damp situations such as the lower, boggy levels of cloud-swept mountain ravines. The nest itself is composed of bits of the pale gray moss and plant fibers lined with

soft cotton grass and other fine materials; the tiny eggs within it are white speckled with chestnut brown. Mr. Horace Wright, in his *Birds of the Jefferson Region in the White Mountains*, says that from eight to ten pairs of the Parula Warbler season by season occupy the fifty-acre piece of woodland on the Highland.

"In the evergreen woods of the north we are also likely to see another common Warbler called the

**Magnolia**      Magnolia who is with us here in the  
**Warbler**      neighboring birch tree. He might easily

be mistaken for the Myrtle who is somewhat similarly marked excepting that the latter wears a tiny yellow cap. Magnolia has no yellow on his head but a great deal of it on his breast and throat, and has a strong striping of black extending up his sides; there is a broad white patch on his wings, a dash of white over and back of the eye, with more of white midway across the tail. He is common among the spruces on the mountain trails as high up as three or even four thousand feet. He, also, will sing until late July. The song is loud and clear; in this respect like that of the Yellow Warbler. Each of the first four notes rises a bit and all increase in power as they go, the succeeding three final notes, the middle one of which is the highest, are delivered with twice the rapidity of the others. Like most of the Warblers





Cape May Warbler  
(above)

Parula Warbler  
(below)



Prairie Warbler  
(above)

Yellow Red-poll  
(below)

which love a cool climate the Magnolia breeds in the far north, and southerly only among the mountains down to Virginia; it winters from southern Mexico to Panama.

“The commonest Warbler in the Arboretum and about the vicinity of Boston is the Yellow Warbler, a lively and bright little fellow, all yellow with the back tinged greenish and the breast lightly streaked with chestnut-red. It is one of the familiar birds of May, hereabouts, but it does not visit us in the region of the White Mountains though it passes by up the Connecticut Valley as far north as Wells River arriving there sometimes as early as May 5th. In the Arboretum this Warbler has a particular liking for the experimental shrubbery grounds, and here he is to-day filling every flowering bush with his blithe-some chippering music. His singing is loud enough for you to hear through the open ventilators of the clattering railroad car in its passage through the tender green woodlands of May. The Yellow Warbler nests in the shrubbery or in a small tree not many feet above the ground, and I have seen the female sitting on her eggs in the nest immediately under a beautiful cluster of yellow Scotch roses. The nest, of course, was built long before the roses were in bloom, yet later on the yellow bird was shielded from

**Yellow  
Warbler**

discovery more by the color of the roses than by the half-hidden situation of the nest.

“There is still another little fellow singing along with the Yellow Warbler whom, as yet, I can hear but not see. Watch for an olive-backed bird with a yellow breast. Often the ear serves more promptly and better than the eye, and I can tell you at once that this other fellow is the **Prairie Warbler**. Why? Because the song runs up the musical scale half a dozen semitones or so and abruptly drops at the end not more than another semitone. No other Warbler’s song is precisely like it. At last the Prairie is in full sight on a lower branch of this little apple tree near us loaded with bloom. He is one of the smallest of the Warblers—scarcely more than four and a half inches in length—olive green on the back with chestnut markings, wings and tail brownish, a scarcely visible buff wing-bar, yellow on the underparts with black streaks on the sides, a black stripe through the eye, and another broader one over the cheek. His costume is pretty but not fanciful like that of many another Warbler. He likes open places and deserted old fields grown up with weeds and bushes. I have seen him often in Massachusetts, but never within the borders of New Hampshire. He is very rare in the northern parts of New York State, but quite

common at Oyster Bay, Long Island, according to Theodore Roosevelt. In a word, he is a distinctly southern Warbler, and as far as I know there is no record of his appearance north of Manchester, New Hampshire. His tastes are apparently the exact opposite of birds like the Parula, Blackburnian, Nashville, Myrtle, Blackpoll, and Black-throated Green. He winters from central Florida to the Bahamas and West Indies.

“Among the more southern species is also the Golden-winged Warbler, and here is one of the representatives now in the birch tree beside us. His annual appearance in the Arnold Arboretum either one side or the other of Hemlock Hill is as regular as clockwork. If the season is not backward you will see him here by May 14th. The earliest record I have near Boston is May 5th. His visits are short, for by August 20th, he has flown southward again. In the Valley of the Hudson he may be found as far north as the Highlands. I think he is most likely to be found in open woodlands or amongst the tangled shrubbery of low-lying, neglected fields. He is one of the quiet warblers and gives you plenty of time to adjust your glasses on his fanciful uniform. I hope he will turn before your inspection of him is complete and give you a front view of his really

**Golden-  
winged  
Warbler**

comical phiz. His general color is a light blue gray, on his head is a cap of yellow, three strong bands of black, one across each eye and another under the chin in combination form, in full face, something of the appearance of the letter T on a white ground, and on each wing is a band of gold like an epaulet; the tips of his tail feathers and his underparts are white. He sits calmly fronting you, and in a very deliberate tone of voice remarks, *Pss-st! zee, zee, zee*, the pitch being quite off the keyboard of the piano. One can scarcely call that a song, yet he has nothing else to offer you. It seems as if he would say, 'I expect your entire attention; behold me! I am the very model of a modern Major General.' But it is rather difficult to get all those words to fit his ridiculous *Pss-st! zee, zee, zee*. Yet surely in erect military bearing he is equal to any member of the regiment on parade, even if, in his music, he cannot 'beat the band,' at least he is a striking example of a very correct-appearing bird. This Warbler builds its nest on the ground among the tangled vines and crowded bushes; it is composed of dried grasses interwoven with plant-stems, and will contain four or five dull white eggs speckled with pale brown. The species breeds from central Minnesota to Massachusetts, and southward to Iowa, New Jersey, and in the mountains to northern Georgia. It winters



as far south as Guatemala and Colombia, South America."

"Parter," interposed Boy Blue in a suppressed tone of voice, "come over this way quick, there is a yellowish bird dodging about among the leaves of that beech tree, singing softly to himself or some other bird I can't see; can you tell what's up? He looks like a large Warbler with a yellow throat, olive back, grayish tail, and two not very distinct wing-bars. There, he just gave a louder buzzing call!"

"Your description is sufficient," responded Parter, "and with the notes we are hearing now it is not difficult to recognize the Yellow-throated Vireo, though I have not caught sight of him yet; when he reappears and you scan his face you will find he has a yellow eye-ring. Now he is singing in full voice, you must notice that it is entirely too low-pitched for a Warbler's voice. It is his habit, once in a while, to sing *sotto voce*, to use the Italian term, that is, in an undertone. Many birds have an attack of that sort of thing, I suppose you might call it just thinking out loud, as some queer old people are apt to do. His regular song, you see, does possess a distinct buzzing tone, and in this respect it is decidedly different from the songs of the other vireos. One of his characteristic musical utterances

**Yellow-  
throated  
Vireo**

is composed of four notes, the first two only a couple of tones apart, the last two a whole octave apart. The rest of his notes are in groups of two or three, and all are characterized by that buzzing overtone. He is not so common as the Red-eye, and we will scarcely meet with him north of Hanover and Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire; but he is far from an uncommon bird in many of the streets of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and also in the vicinity of Boston. He is also quite as fairly common in the lower Hudson River Valley. The nest is perfectly cup-shaped, and is lodged in a Y branch about twenty feet above the ground. The egg is white flecked with a variety of browns. This Vireo inhabits the region from southern Saskatchewan to Maine southward to the Gulf States. It winters from southern Mexico to Colombia, South America."

## CHAPTER VIII

### JUNE

“‘JUNE with its roses—June the gladdest month of our capricious year’; and who would not love—

“A noise like to a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune?”

“Of course, speaking of noises,” explained Parter, “there’s quite a difference between them. The tinkling gurgle of the mountain brook is a joy; the deafening grind of a city trolley is not. One kind of a noise soothes your spirit and another roils it. There is an awful grandeur in the roll of thunder and a mean distraction in the ear-piercing shriek of an ungreased car wheel. You cannot make a pleasing sound without in some degree producing music. The measured roll and chink of the powerful engine, which drives the graceful steamboat through the yielding waters of the Hudson, has within it the rhythm of music, otherwise there is no such thing

as rhythm, or we do not possess what is termed a musical ear and in a certain sense are deaf. If it were not so how can you account for the baby being put to sleep by the pleasing rhythmic motion of the rocking cradle? It is not only the regularity of sound but the regularity of motion which is soothing. I do not care how noisy the birds are in June, singing as we say 'to beat the band' we love that kind of a noise, and the month is full of enchantment with the whetting of scythes, the rustle of new-made hay, the hum of bumblebees, the cooing of Cuckoos, and the harping of Veerys. I wouldn't blame you, Boy Blue, if, when you fell asleep under your blooming old haystack, it was in the drowsy month of June!

"But come, we must be off early this morning, for I wish to visit Mr. Bicknell's Thrush, who perches on the Nose of his Verdant Highness Mt. Mansfield of Vermont, or Verd Mont as it was called by the original French settlers, for the giant hills they discovered were green to their very summits. There we will meet, also, the Winter Wren who nests in his woodland beard, and the Ruby-crowned Kinglet who pipes his jingle under the shadow of his noble Chin in the Notch of the ancient smugglers of a century and more ago. I'll warrant you if ever the Ruby-crown let off one of his loud and shrill ecstasies by the light of the moon, those smugglers must have dropped

their boodle and run for their lives. It depends upon your state of mind whether you are frightened by a little bird or not, but when both the bird and a guilty conscience disturb you, and you are a ghostly smuggler into the bargain—why, good-night!”

In the early hour on the way through the Baker River Valley and around the mountains, the train passed numberless birds and other inhabitants of the wild country not wholly awake to their own danger as the puffing locomotive approached. A number of fearless sparrows flew abreast with the train for a while and outdid it in speed, then a young deer appeared on a sandbar of the river; he had come down the mountain for a drink and as the train rushed by eyed it with calm indifference although he was not more than two hundred feet distant. An Owl slowly left his perch on a yellow birch in the shadow of a wooded gulley and disappeared in the thicker foliage beyond; two woodchucks scampered to their holes in surprised and unbecoming haste, a dozen White-throats in a gray birch too near the track for comfort left it in a swirling flight evidently more excited by a hawk overhead than the passing of the train, and finally a huge Bald Eagle flew from a precipitous granite crag and disappeared among the spruces on the mountain side across the valley.

**Bald  
Eagle**

“I think,” remarked Parter, “that might be the female bird leaving her nest. The situation in the rough straggling growth on top the crag is exactly suited to the Eagle. The bird always chooses just such an inaccessible spot to build her eyrie. It is convenient to the river and from so high a perch as that it is easy for an eagle’s eye to scan the water for a great distance up and down the valley. No fish will float near the surface dead or alive without discovery, and a mountain lake a mile or so from this point offers its fishing privileges also. The Bald Eagle’s head, neck, and tail are white, the rest of the plumage is sepia black, and the bill and feet are yellow. His food is mostly anything in the line of flesh; water fowl and small dead animals—or living ones if he can catch them—included. The nest is a bulky collection of sticks and twigs crowded and interwoven, thinly lined with bits of moss; it is built near the top of the tree, and usually contains two gray-white eggs about two inches long. These are laid some time very late in March—in this part of the country—and are hatched about five weeks later; but the young do not leave the nest until late July or early August. No eagles have nested in this vicinity of late years, to my knowledge, but long, long ago there was a pair which built their eyrie on the granite crags of Mt. Tecumseh in Waterville, about seven



miles eastward from our valley; and another pair built on Eagle Cliff in the Franconia Notch.

"I know of but one pair of Eagles anywhere near us which is on record; they nest on a spur of Mt. Cardigan, on the western side of Newfound Lake, fully fifteen miles south of our summer home as the crow flies. Not infrequently in September or October the Bald Eagle has been seen sailing high overhead southward in the Pemigewasset Valley. It inhabits all of North America north of Mexico."

After making a connection with the Montpelier and Well's River Railroad the route proceeded through a wildly picturesque region of Vermont whose hills held a beautiful silvery sheet of water called Groton Pond. Here an Osprey or

Fish Hawk was fishing, and Boy Blue's keen eyes saw him at a considerable

**Osprey or  
Fish Hawk**

distance dash at the surface of the pond and emerge from the water with a fish in his claws. "You may always know him from any other hawk," said Parter, "because his head, neck, and underparts are white; the back and wings are dull dark brown, the feet bluish gray. He is a long slender bird measuring over twenty inches from head to tail, and might easily be mistaken for an eagle, but the white underparts distinguish him from his famous relative. I doubt whether he is taking up his residence beside this

pond; it is more likely that he is working his way northward although this is rather late in the season for him to be passing. He breeds as far north as Labrador, and is far commoner by the seacoast than up here in the mountains. His call is a high-pitched shrill whistle.

"You saw him dash feet foremost into the lake and almost disappear, but he quickly shakes the water off, rises, and sails calmly to the nearest shore to devour his fish. This one has hied himself to one of those stumps on the margin of the pond. These birds nest in colonies well up the trees twenty-five to forty feet. The nest is made up of sticks and rubbish. It usually contains three cream-white, dark, or chocolate-brown-blotched eggs. Already we have sped past a score of the commoner birds on our journey to meet three or four rare ones. We have seen three Downy Woodpeckers, two Flickers, a half dozen Indigo Buntings and twice as many White-throats. These are only a meager few of the millions

**Wood Pewee** of birds everywhere in most unexpected places. The Wood Pewee sings in this tree close beside the busy, bustling little station. It is plain he does not mind the confusion and noise, and it is equally plain that he likes the quiet and seclusion of his own particular woodland home. Here he is so near the train we can see his

tail flip as he calls *Pe-a-wee, pe-a-wee, peer!* Maybe he is expecting a friend among the passengers: *Sally come here, Sally come here, Here!* True, it may be nonsense to interpret the song that way, but at the same time, there is no denying the fact that the drawling, plaintive whistle is to let some other bird know he is right here in this spot. His home is back in the woods somewhere, saddled perhaps on a birchen limb twenty-five feet or more up in the air. He wears a smoky brown suit with a dingy white shirt-front and two not overdistinct white wing-bars. He has a certain liking for the country village and does not mind building the nest in one of its trees. True to his name, also, he will select a home in the woods wild or tame, and Mr. Eaton reports that in the Adirondacks he has found him camping out on the slopes of Mt. Marcy only four miles from its summit!

“Well, the whole country belongs to the birds so why should they not go where they please; as for this train, I suppose they have a perfect right to consider it a blustering, clattering interloper, an impudent trespasser on their own territory.”

A little later in the day during the trip from Stowe to the foot of the mountain by automobile, Parter said he was convinced that the birds owned the highways too. “It is all you can do to keep from running over them,” he said. “They vie with the

zigzagging hen in making as many claw-prints on the road as possible. Look at them! The Vesper Sparrow, Junco, Chippy, and White-throat are right in our path, the telegraph wires hold all their relatives; on the fences and in the trees are Song Sparrows, Robins, Myrtle Warblers, Black-throated Greens, Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos, Phœbes, Wood Pewees, Chebecs, Redstarts, and Chestnut-sided Warblers. If the fields and the roadsides are not theirs who in the world do they belong to? My idea is, whatever thing it is your privilege to enjoy is yours in the fullest sense of the word whether you legally possess it or not. That is certainly true of a bird's song, it is immediately yours as soon as you hear and remember it, no one can take it away from you; it is true of this particular song we are hearing now at the gateway of the mountain. I am sure

**Winter  
Wren**

you will never forget it, it is that of the tiny Winter Wren. He is one of the least yet greatest songsters of our mountain slopes. His brown-spotty coloring is almost exactly like that of the House Wren but a trifle darker, the underparts being barred more distinctly. Here is his home away up on the side of Mt. Mansfield, and he is making the forest ring with a hearty welcome for you. I suspect he must have known you were coming so he is putting his best effort in the song. It is



WINTER WREN  
(above)

CAROLINA WREN  
(below)





a silvery, bubbling, piccolo-like rhapsody, reminding one of those brilliant runs that continually surprise us in the music of the great pianist Liszt; the notes are all rapid and crowded close together. It is not in any sense a melody, but is more like a sparkling bit of pianoforte performance. I fancy I can hear the bird say, beat that if you can! He likes a babbling mountain brook, and he will probably trace this one to its source near the summit. But he is a bird of the ravine rather than the mountain top unless that is crowned with a mossy bog where rugged firs and spruces grow. We would find him in any of the ravines of the higher White Mountains, and he is not unlikely to stay there through the winter, though the mercury would certainly register several degrees below zero. His song is a truly wonderful performance for a tiny musician only a trifle over four inches long. He trills, running up the scale, on three or four notes, then bursts like a musical skyrocket and falls in a shower of rippling, tinkling notes. He sings through the early summer and often pipes up again in the autumn. Mr. Glover Allen has reported that he heard him so late as the middle of September about the Carter Lakes, Carter Notch, 3360 feet above tidewater.

“The top of the mountain gained, and the atmosphere clear, we are practically in another world,” said

Parter, after he and the boy had dined in the comfortable hostelry on the summit, and had climbed the steep, bare cliff which was called the Nose. "Perhaps it would be truer to say we live in two worlds, one at our feet, the other four thousand feet up in the sky. Beneath us is nearly the whole shimmering, silvery length of Lake Champlain, bounded on the west by the pale lavender-blue wall of the jagged Adirondacks, and beyond is all the distant world flooded in the golden glory of the slowly setting sun. These stunted spruces beneath us which for a lifetime have struggled upward to reach the sunshine have not had a jolly time of it, they have lacked what might be called a fair chance, for the clouds have got between whenever they could, and that has been a very large part of the time. The old mountain like a slumbering giant with his head resting on a pine pillow—it would be more correct to call it a leafy pillow—there are so few pine needles in it—bears a slight resemblance in outline to a face in profile—forehead, nose, lips, and chin; on this cliff here we are actually scratching his nose with our toes, and below it a remarkable, hermit-like recluse of a bird, a mountain Thrush, has set up housekeeping in his scrubby old beard. The bird was named many years ago for Mr. Eugene P. Bicknell, a wonderfully learned man with a keen knowledge of natural



Chebec  
(above)

Wood Pewee  
(below)



BICKNELL'S THRUSH

science. You must not think Mr. Bicknell's Thrush has his summer residence exclusively here; he is also a dweller in New Hampshire within fifteen miles of our mountain home, among the spruces on the back of Mt. Moosilauke, and in all the scrubby growths of these trees in the higher Franconia and White Mountains. But I wished to bring you here where I might be sure you would see and hear him, and become familiar with his nesting site or possibly find a nest. This is snuggled not more than a foot or two from the ground somewhere in the jungle of these dwarf spruces; it is built of little twigs, plant stems, fine rootlets, mosses and dead leaves. The three or four eggs are blue-green very finely speckled with ruddy brown.

**Bicknell's  
Thrush**

"The sunset hour is creeping on and now begins the Thrush's sweet, harmonic vesper hymn. I think Mr. Torrey has put it cleverly in a few syllables: '*Wee-o, wee-o, wee-o, ti ti wee-o,*' he says the bird sings. You may easily sing these syllables and match up with the rhythm of the bird. But there is still the music itself to account for, and the syllables fail to do that. The only thing which would make the song recognizable would be to place it on the musical staff where it belongs. You see it is a nearly exact copy of the Veery's song so far as that goes, but

it does not go far enough; this Bicknell Thrush sings on. After descending the scale in two or three sweeps as one might draw the bow over two strings of the violin or blow softly on the harmonica, the bird doubles on the lowest note and sweeps upward to the last and high one. This with a few variations is all there is to his song. 'A most ethereal sound at the top of the scale,' writes Mr. Torrey, and he is correct, for the tones are from the highest A sharp on the piano to the high G below it, and from that to the next lower E. If you appeal to the piano you may readily understand what 'the top of the scale' really means. The Veery's voice is lower in pitch as his vocal chords are a trifle longer. The Bicknell Thrush is the darkest and the smallest of all the five Thrushes; he is only six and three quarter inches long.

"The hush of the evening has fallen upon us, and we must descend to the hotel; the Thrushes are gradually quieting down with a final *geep*, *geep*, hither and yon; soon they will all be settled in their nests for the night and will be warm enough, no doubt, though we find sweaters and overcoats comfortable in the keen air, and will find the companionship of the stove very acceptable when we go indoors. This Thrush prefers the cool mountain elevation; nothing below twenty-six hundred feet seems to suit him. We find him



on the slopes of old Lafayette and Cannon, and about the mountain tarn called Lonesome Lake, in the Franconia Notch, where the late Mr. William C. Prime built his wilderness camp. We also meet with him on the upper reaches of dwarf spruce on the shoulders of Mt. Washington and the whole length of the Presidential Range. He is not nearly so rare a bird as many suppose. He is in the Adirondacks, the Catskills, the Green Mountains, and even on old Greylock in Massachusetts. These form groups of comfortable, cool islands in a vast sunny sea of plains and river meadows which he does not like. Is it not strange that he should prefer a cold, misty, clouded summit like this, wind-swept and storm-beaten, to the flowery meadow in the valley below? In winter he lives in the mountains of Hayti, Costa Rica, Panama, and undoubtedly those of northern South America; but if he likes the misty, shadowy jungle he finds plenty of it north or south wherever he goes."

When the sun arose over the pale blue horizon in the misty east close to the Presidential Range of the White Mountains, he found himself ascending a cloudless violet sky which would soon turn to azure under his powerful rays. Suddenly the Thrushes were singing again and numerous White-throated Sparrows joined in the chorus with what Parter

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called a new version of their song. "It is quite appropriate," he commented, "to the time and the situation on the rocky ridgepole of the Green Mountain State. What should he sing but, *Day dawns glorious, glorious, glorious!* but the flibbertigibbet Warblers have another idea in their heads quite unrelated to the day; it sounds like *Sic-um, sic-um, sic-um, sic-um, sic-um*, and they are chasing flies! Every one of them is up and out getting his breakfast. Blackpolls are flying in every direction, and the Myrtles are winging it over the eastern gable of the hotel after flies and bugs which are warming themselves up there in the sunshine.

"Down the road a little way we shall hear the two mountain Thrushes singing at once, Mr. Bicknell's just above, and Mr. Swainson's or the Olive-backed Thrush Olive-back a little below, among the taller spruces. It wouldn't be possible for you to tell the two species apart even with the aid of your glass unless you were an expert ornithologist. A matter of coloring between them counts for nothing in the wild woods, for the light is too often capricious or uncertain; the olive of the Olive-back is not green enough, the darker olive-brown of the Bicknell is not dark enough. Both birds are delicately spotted on the chest with sepia blotches strung rather close together, and the white underparts of

both are slightly buffish. But as soon as one of the birds sings, you can be perfectly sure which one it is. The Olive-back's song is like that of the Veery turned upside down; I always like to picture the Veery musically sliding downstairs, and the Olive-back climbing up a step at a time. Mr. Torrey says he sings, *I love, I love, I love, I love you*, which fits the notes and the rhythm very well. The steps bounce upward in the song and finish most times with a short sharp jingle. Mr. Bicknell says: 'The first note is loudest and most liquid after which the melody becomes rapidly fainter.' But that definition would do quite as well for the Hermit's song. The truth of the matter is, this Thrush ascends the scale in what a musician calls a series of minor thirds, something which any child may find at the piano by striking every third note (counting in the ebony ones) and progressing up the keyboard. Just now I imagine the bird is singing, *A-risé, a-risé, a-risé, a-risé*; most timely advice for those who are still abed on such a glorious morning. It is on record that this Olive-backed Thrush breeds from the extreme northwestern corner of this continent in Alaska southeastwardly to Newfoundland, locally, southward again to Oregon, Nevada, Michigan, and eastward to Maine, and in the mountains of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. He winters from southern

Mexico southward to Argentina, South America. What an extraordinary range for a tiny living aeroplane with an expanse of wing not greater than eight inches; a matter of nearly nine thousand miles extending over two continents! The nest of this Thrush is composed of practically the same materials as those forming the nest of Bicknell's Thrush; it is usually placed from four to ten feet above the ground in a smaller spruce or fir. Here among the more

**Golden-  
crowned  
and Ruby-  
crowned  
Kinglets**

flourishing hemlocks and spruces is the Golden-crowned Kinglet. He also aspires to an exalted mountain residence of from 3000 to 4500 feet above the level of the sea. Actually, Mt. Mansfield's Chin is 4430 feet high; the mountain is gimbal-jawed, that is, the Chin obtrudes more than the Nose, but directly in the shelter of the spruces under it are many of these dainty Warbler-like, green-gray birds scarcely four inches long, with a topknot of yellow-gold deepened in the middle with cadmium-orange, and bordered with black. There is a slight green-yellow edging to the wing and tail feathers, and a whitish wing-bar. This Kinglet is a rather common resident of the White Mountain region, and he often spends the winter among the spruces that skirt the greater peaks. His song is a very insignificant one, as you now know by hearing it yourself; it has but



RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET





a very slight resemblance to the extraordinary performance of his relative the Ruby-crown.

"The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is a similarly small green-gray character with a tiny scarlet-red crest which you do not often see unless the bird is in an excited state of mind, then it rises like a flame of ruby from his perky little crown and you may be sure trouble is brewing for somebody in his vicinity. Two of these Kinglets together in the branches of a white birch usually mean a display of red feathers and acrobatic feats on the wing which it would be difficult for even your sharp eyes to follow. I have heard the little fellow sing in the woods on the slope of this mountain, but that was several years ago in late May. He is more frequently seen and heard in the fall migration; that of the spring season is about finished now.

This Kinglet breeds in Canada and in the northern part of Maine, and from there northward to Ungava, Keewatin, and extreme northwestern Alaska. It winters as far south as Guatemala. His song is a soft though piccolo-clear succession of trills, first up and then down, with a few breaks resembling the rather grating notes of the House Wren. But his voice is fuller and sweeter far than that of his relative, the Golden-crown.

The Golden-crowned Kinglet springs what I might

call a musical arch of slender, vibrating silver wires, a thin *zee, zee, zee, zee, te, te, ter-te-te!* each *zee* tone ascending a little higher than the one before it, and the final half a warble trickling down to nothing. His nest is like a sagging pocket, a reduced copy of the Oriole's remarkable structure, but it is not so cleverly built, and is not nearly so deep. In it you would find an unusual number of eggs—eight or nine of a buff-white tone spotted with pale brown. Commonly birds' nests contain not more than four eggs. Mr. Frank Bolles writes in his book, *At the North of Bearcamp Water*, 'The Golden-crested Kinglets were present in great numbers on the 13th of October, 1889, in the Bearcamp Valley, and as they passed through the evergreens they accomplished a marvelous amount of house-cleaning. With them or near them Chickadees, Red Nuthatches, White Nuthatches, and Brown Creepers took part in the keen inspection of the trees, and woe came to the insect which fell under their eyes.' That was, of course, in the time of the autumn migration, but all through late May and the earlier part of summer one may find this beautiful little singer piping his lay among the evergreen woodlands which clothe the summits and shoulders of the White Mountains. In his company you will frequently see the Chickadee and the Red-breasted Nuthatch who is a trifle smaller

than his White-breasted relative, and whose underparts are almost completely stained with light rusty brown. This Nuthatch is also a mountain bird which prefers an altitude of quite three thousand feet or more. I have seen him on Mt. Washington in July, and here he is now among the spruces and balsams in June, calling to nobody knows who, with his nasal *nye, nye*, which proves that he is another perfectly good Yankee! Being a smaller bird with a smaller throat than that of his relative, his voice is pitched higher. You can see, now that his face shows well in the morning light, a distinctly black stripe through and back of the eye. The other species does not have that stripe nor any rusty coloring; in other respects the birds are alike, and so are their nests and eggs.

**Red-  
breasted  
Nuthatch**

Among all the birds which creep over the trunks of the trees there are none quite so common as the Woodpeckers who spend their days hammering at the bark in a grim summons for the insect to surrender. Here is the Hairy Woodpecker, the big brother of the Downy, who has a decided preference for mountain woods; although I know it is on record that the Downy is occasionally discovered outside of his 'sphere of influence'—if I may use in-

**Hairy and  
Downy  
Wood-  
peckers**

ternational language—courting the acquaintance of insects which inhabit some of our higher mountain ravines, it is rather unusual for him to do so. The Hairy is really the fellow who belongs there, and he will climb, sometimes, to a height of four thousand feet or more if there is plenty of birch, fir, and spruce offered as an inducement. Indeed, he does not mind living on the mountain all the year round. You can see a scarlet patch on the nape of his neck; that distinguishes the male from the female bird. He is the one who ties up his hair with a scarlet ribbon, not she! He is black and white, the wings black-spotted or barred with white; the very important difference between him and the Downy is shown in his completely white outer tail feathers, the Downy's being slightly spotted with black. You notice he hitches himself along the trunk in any direction but short distances at a time, intent upon examining every crevice in the bark, and occasionally the chips fly in pretty lively fashion. His commonest call note is *qu-ick, qu-ick*, as if he would have the grubs know they'll be dug out of hiding double quick under his chisel-like bill. This species is about nine and a half inches long; the Downy is but six and a half. Both birds dig their nesting holes commonly in some old dead or half-dead tree, with an entrance about two inches in diameter; the eggs are generally four in



Downy Woodpecker





number and are pure white. The Downy is by far the most numerous species of the two. It is a very common winter resident of the woodlands in our valley, and Mr. Eaton says in New York State there are about seven of them to one Hairy Woodpecker. Of course, it is the smallest of all the various species, and I am inclined to believe the most valuable one, for he destroys untold numbers of bark-boring beetles and their larvæ, the cocoons of many moths whose caterpillars are a constant menace to fruit and other trees, the larvæ of gall insects, ants, wood borers and grubs of all kinds.

There is one other mountain Woodpecker which it would be great good fortune to meet in these woods, but he hasn't turned up so far. I mean the Arctic Three-toed. He is but a trifle larger than the Hairy—perhaps three quarters of an inch longer, not more. We would know him at once if he came within the range of our glasses for on his crown is a patch of golden-yellow which is a color unknown to any other of the species except the American Three-toed which is a very northern species and rare in this part of the country except that he has been known to breed on the slopes of Mt. Marcy and in the swamp at its base in the Adirondacks. But on the other hand the Arctic Three-toed is fairly common throughout the year

Arctic  
Three-toed  
Woodpecker

in the spruce and balsam forests of the Adirondack region, although I have happened to see him but once in the White Mountains. His coat is a blackish steel-blue, the underparts are white, there are a few white bars on the wings, and the sides are barred with black. His foot has but three toes, two in front and one behind. I have no memorandum of his note, but it is reported to be a loud, shrill *chirk, chirk*. This Woodpecker is not such an uncommon one in New York and New England as might be supposed. There are some nine records of his appearance in Massachusetts during all but the summer months of the year 1919. Frank Bolles saw him in the summertime in the deep forest on the eastern face of Mt. Passaconaway in or previous to the year 1892. He has been seen by many observers in the White Mountain region and also other parts of New Hampshire and Maine in many a year since that time, but usually in the winter. My own discovery of the bird was in the Franconia Notch in June, 1891, and I have an idea that several of the species were there in that particular year, for Bradford Torrey records finding him at Lonesome Lake in October.

Here on the road not so far below the summit house we hear a third Thrush singing his wonderful song which, in Vermont as well as beside our summer home in the White Mountains, is unmistakably built

upon the Scotch scale. Well, what do I mean by that? I will explain; go to the piano again and strike in succession the five black keys going upward from G flat and you have it. No

**Hermit  
Thrush**

Hermit Thrush sings off that scale, no Scotch melody which is distinctly such leaves it! So we are face to face with a remarkable fact, an American bird is singing Scotch music! It would indeed be strange if it were not the case that the bird discovered the scale and used it a few thousand years before there was such a person as a Scotchman. I am telling you something which few people understand and, I fear, the ornithologist least of all. But we have become so used to our regular pianoforte scale of twelve even semitones we do not realize there are others which are extremely primitive and that this is one of them. You know the Hermit sings in the woodland just behind our cottage to-day, but you would scarcely imagine he had been singing—or his ancestors had—for a thousand years on practically the same ground, and on a musical scale which in time would be named for a tribe of men living in Europe. But that is precisely the state of the case. What a glorious song it is aside from any scale; there is one long flutelike tone followed by a number of short, silvery ones which rapidly sweep upward and back again *always upon those five*

*ebonies*; the Thrush never leaves them so long as he sings on the key of G flat. When the key is changed—and he is ever shifting it—he sticks to the same five-toned scale. That is so wonderful in itself aside from his brilliant silvery voice, that in my estimation he beats the Nightingale as easily as the other birds 'beat the band.' But Parter must own up to great enthusiasm for the music of the Hermit Thrush, and Bradford Torrey is not far behind him for he writes: 'Of the three (Bicknells, Olive-backs, and Hermits), the Hermit is beyond comparison the finest singer, both as to voice and tune.' His breeding ground is from southern Yukon (a point just north of British Columbia), southwestern Keewatin and northern Quebec, south to Connecticut, the mountains of Pennsylvania and Maryland, New York, northern Ohio, northern Michigan, central Minnesota, and central Alberta. He flies as far south for the winter season as Texas and Cuba, and on his return reaches our Pemigewasset Valley about the third of May. His song I have often heard as late as the tenth of August, and in June he will seldom cease singing before eight o'clock in the evening. The nest is on or near the ground, often hidden among the ferns or seedling hemlocks; it is built of coarse grass, plant stems, old leaves, and moss, and lined with fine rootlets and pine needles; within it there are usually



Hermit Thrush  
(above)

Olive-backed Thrush  
(below)





four green-blue eggs. This Thrush is far less hermit-like than his name would lead us to suppose, indeed, I have seen him on the ground near the swing in which the children were swinging apparently quite undisturbed by their chatter and play. He looks very much like the other Thrushes but when he is on the ground you have an excellent opportunity to see the ruddy tone of brown on the lower back and root of the tail which distinguishes him from the rest. You see, at present he is atop the fir tree silhouetted against the bright sky, and it is impossible under such conditions to tell his colors; but the glass shows up the spots on his chest. His preference is for the thin, cool evergreen woodlands but I find he likes the maple orchard well enough to spend a good deal of his time singing there, and he keeps it up for a considerable *round* until he has tried every key sharp and flat and gone to bits on the highest one. So there's nothing left for us to do but gather up the fragments in the basket of memory and return to the hotel in time for dinner."

## CHAPTER IX

### JUNE IN THE FRANCONIA NOTCH

“HIE there! Boy Blue,” called Parter on a bell-clear morning in the first week of June, “we must be off to the mountains in the north, where Hawthorne’s Old Stone Face—the Old Man of the Mountain—looks down reprovngly upon our valley quickly greening with the emerald foliage of early summer but not with the corn and beans of the belated farmer’s still unplowed fields. ‘What!’ I imagine I hear him say, ‘June here and everything and everybody late? Behold me, always on guard through night and day. I’ve never missed a morning at watchful waiting for aeons of years!’

“I think he waits for the farmer to reform. Well, he will have to keep on waiting! However, we will call on the ancient and disgruntled gentleman and see whether any birds have built their nests in the trees under his chin while he has slept. The Profile House may not be open yet but they know Parter up there, and will doubtless take care of us for a night. If the weather holds good we will pay our respects to old

bald-headed Lafayette, that is, if your stout legs are good for a nearly four-mile climb. On the trail I am sure we will meet the Bicknell Thrush and other light-winged skyscrapers. The dew is still sparkling on the grass, and if we take the automobile at once we will be at the old Revolutionary General's feet within an hour and a quarter.

"Now we are really in the Notch," said Parter, as the car passed the Flume, "and presently you will see the ancient forest crowding down upon the road, and its stillness will be broken by the voices of many Warblers. The mountains will close in upon us with buttresses of granite and steepy slopes covered with dark olive spruces, and the tiny Pemigewasset River will gush and gurgle over the rocky sills of its mountain birthplace in dancing haste to join company with the brimming Merrimac in far-away Franklin town. Red-starts, Chestnut-sides, Myrtles, and Yellow-throats follow the crystal stream with the Black-throated Green and the Nashville as leaders. I am sure they all have a particular liking for the music of rushing water. Where the woods are open and the streamlets flow they are sure to gather in cheery company."

"There, look there!" interrupted Boy Blue in some excitement, pointing to a clump of young hemlock and spruce, "I saw a bright red bird flying close to the road beside the evergreens."

“Then we will halt the car for a minute,” ordered Parter, “I have no doubt you have seen the Scarlet Tanager. Yes, there he is in the spruce with black wings and tail and coat of brilliant vermilion, a regular miniature Mephistopheles off the stage, let loose in the woods. Now he sings for you; a sweet voice, a wee bit husky but flowing and melodic:

**Scarlet  
Tanager**

“Summer’s coming, summer’s coming,  
Prattl’ing birds say,  
Summer’s coming, summer’s coming,  
Coming this way.  
Wild-woods sighing, winter’s dying,  
Farewell blithe May,  
Lovers mooning, birds a-tuning,  
Coming June’s day.

“Nonsense, all this—just Parter’s nonsense in a jingle, but note that the rhyme is set in groups of two syllables not in three. So the music is distinctly different from that of the Robin whose notes are set in groups of three and only occasionally in two.

“Some years ago as I stood on a hill overlooking Lake Wentworth many miles south of here, I whistled the Tanager’s song for the benefit of a little girl who held my hand and begged that I would call the bird, which lived, she said, in the maple hollow below.



Scarlet Tanager  
(Male above, female below)



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Towhee



We were with a company of bird-students, and I had answered, 'I'll try.' To my amazement the bird responded to my call, approached nearer and nearer, and finally in company with his green-yellow mate perched in a tree beside us. I was never more surprised in my life; but after all, why should I have been? The song of the bird was simply copied in the exact pitch of voice, and most birds possess a large bump of curiosity; it was the simple, unquestioning faith of the little girl which accomplished the happy result, for it never would have occurred to me to whistle without her suggestion.

"I have no doubt that at the present moment the Scarlet Tanager's mate sits on her nest in some spruce in the depths of this forest. The nest is loosely constructed of fine twigs, rootlets, and weed stalks and is situated well out on a horizontal limb, perhaps fifteen or more feet high. The three or four green-blue eggs are strongly flecked with red-brown. This is a truly tropical bird in color at least; he comes to us late in the spring and departs for the south again as early as the first of October. His territory extends from Manitoba to New Brunswick and southward to Virginia and Illinois. He winters in northern South America. But we must leave his Mephistophelian Highness, return to the car, and continue our climb through the Notch. Now a solitary White-throat

is advising some vacillating farmer to *Sow wheat Peaverly, Peaverly, Peaverly*, regardless of the risk of a late frost, and the slate-colored Junco is tinkling his glassy bell as a last call to his mate for late breakfast; it is a dainty trilling little note rippling along for about four seconds at a time.

“Hark, what is that, another Tanager? No, surely not. It is the voice of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak

**Rose- which I have heard once before in the**  
**breasted woods near our house. Let’s halt the**  
**Grosbeak car again for a moment and listen to his**  
 song; it is so similar in tone to that of the

Scarlet Tanager yet so different in character that it would be fine for you to be able to distinguish between the two. It is not altogether easy to do that. Mr. Torrey writes of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, ‘He has taken the Tanager’s tune . . . smoothed it and smoothed it, and sweetened it and sweetened it, till it is smoother than oil and sweeter than honey.’ Yes, that is the truth of it, he rolls his song into sugarplums but the simile doesn’t help us. Something else does. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak has his own idea about music, he sings in groups of three notes so closely strung together that though your ear cannot easily separate them, still, if you listen attentively you will detect a dancing rhythm, and an accent laid upon each second note of



Little Willoughby Cady, aged four, and two young Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, rescued nestlings, brought by the family

By courtesy of W. Y. Cady. Photograph retouched by the author



On intimate terms

By courtesy of W. Y. Cady. Photograph retouched by the author

the group. The bird is a bit sentimental, he sings,  
O come be my bride,

"No ill may betide the sweet little maid that sits by my  
side.

Do you think you'll e'er see

A more dapper-dressed bridegroom than me?

"Compare this with the rhythm of the Tanager's song and you will see at once it is the difference between the figure two and the figures three and five. To describe a song as sweet does not help one much. The call-note is a very high pitched *pip*. The Robin warbles along in hurried and jerky triplets, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak in connected and accented triplets, and the Scarlet Tanager in easy-going couplets.

"This Grosbeak, as his costume certainly shows, is something of a dandy; you can see the perfection of his style as he sits upon that branch of hemlock yonder. A black coat, hood, wings and tail, white bars and patches on the wings, the outer tail feathers tipped with white, the underparts white, a beautiful rose-red shirt-front in form like a triangle, and a powerful, parrot-like, ivory-yellow bill. He is a mountain valley bird, much as the Scarlet Tanager is—likes rich woodlands, swamp maples, and river birches, though very often you will find him on the borders of the spruce forest just as we see him here.

His territory extends from Manitoba to Maine and southward through the mountains to North Carolina and to Kansas. He winters in northern South America. The nest is similar to that of the Tanager and the eggs are also blue-green. The female looks like a big-billed, brown-striped Sparrow. This bird is a great destroyer of the June bug, potato beetle, and grapevine beetle.

"Here we cross the rapidly narrowing Pemigewasset whose rock-strewn bed furnishes many a shimmering bathtub for the birds; scores of them are flipping their wings in the cool little side-pools this morning, no doubt. I see a large fellow now contemplating a plunge! No, he is after a drink. There! He flies straight across our roadway. It is the Woodcock.

**Woodcock** Only once before have I seen him in this region, and that was fully fifteen years ago, in the uplands of Ellsworth twenty miles south of the Notch. I plainly saw his glassy eye set near the top of his head, his abrupt, chisel-shaped bill and ashen gray tail. One must sometimes identify a bird on the wing within the flash of an eye in point of time, if you succeed it is because you are quick to look for the distinguishing marks. I caught my bird by what a Frenchman would say was a *coup d'œil*, by the flash of his eye, bill, and tail! The general coloring is a mixture of browns and grays. The range of



this game bird extends from the Gulf Coast northward to Manitoba, Ungava, and Labrador; it is unusual to find him at an elevation like this of over fifteen hundred feet, but he is by the river and the damp woods which he likes, and I am sure this particular individual is only an accidental visitor. The bird has been found upon the road in Randolph twenty-two miles northeast of us at practically the same elevation. He nests too, in the bottom lands of Lancaster, well north of us, and were we there in May most likely we would hear his famous spiral flight song which is the craziest kind of a performance. He rises from the ground with a sudden whirr, 'loops the loop,' shrilly whistles an incoherent song the while, ascends in circles four hundred or more feet in the air, and then pitches in crazy angles downward to the earth again. The song is no more musical than the ecstatic frenzy of the Ovenbird a-wing. One is reminded, rather, of a three-year-old baby's imitative essays at the pianoforte; in parts it is very suggestive of Debussy! Nor bird nor baby, however, could beat the great French musician at entrancing dissonances. This Woodcock, alas, has passed us in silence. Some day you may hear him in his native wilds and learn to appreciate his tune better than Parter, but take my word for it, the expression ecstatic frenzy is well put. It is not a highfalutin one

intended to dazzle you. It means just joy-crazy! Imagine little brother with daddy on all fours chasing him upstairs at bedtime in a game of 'Bears.' There you have it! The gleeful squeals, ringing laughter, and nervous excitement at the delicious prospect of being swallowed whole, is exactly what one might call ecstatic frenzy. The Ovenbird and the Woodcock reach the same crazy state of mind on occasions and explode like a rocket in capricious and scintillating music.

"A little while more and we shall see the Old Man. Watch the towering granite cliff of Cannon Mountain and at the edge of the summit, if the early foliage between is not too thick, you will see the stony feature suddenly take shape right before your eyes. There he is; with a fixed and melancholy expression the barren result of watchful waiting for Boy Blue's cows to get in the corn which is not yet planted! Or does he wait patiently for the millennium? the corn and that appear to be equally distant. Starr King suggests that he is a benignant, mighty angel sitting among the hills, enrobed in a cloud vesture of purple and gold. If that is true then the weary face will some day wear a smile when every valley shall be filled with the song of birds and God's beautiful world shall no longer be made hideous with the din of battle and the carnage of warfare.

“What! the Old Man has a visitor; the Goshawk flaps his impudent wing under his very nose. He is a bold and reckless robber sailing northward to Franconia, perhaps planning **Goshawk** to raid somebody’s hen-roost. How did I recognize him at this distance you ask? Well, he is one of the largest Hawks, his colors are gray and grayish white, and I could plainly see with my glass the wavy grayish marking on his breast; he is slate-blue above with a sepia black head. No other hawk can answer to that description. It is true that his eye—the iris part—is red, but it would be impossible for one to see that, it would not be necessary, the blue-gray coloring is all-sufficient for identification. How quickly he has been swallowed up in the background of forest green! He is the common hawk in the cooler regions of North America from Maine and New York northward. Fortunately he is rather a rare summer visitor in this part of the country. The so-called Hen or Chicken Hawk, which is the Red-tailed Hawk is far commoner south of this point. His rusty-red tail is an unmistakable mark of recognition, his upper plumage is brown varied with touches of sepia and ruddy brown. He has a squealing whistle, which, if I imitate it in the neighborhood of the poultry-yard sets all the chickens in a panic and the rooster a-squawking. But his record is really not so bad; out

of 562 stomachs examined by Mr. Fisher, 409 contained mice and other little mammals, and only 54 poultry, which are scientific facts that tell the actual truth.

“At last we are at the height of the Notch; the manager in charge of the Profile House will take care of us, so we may be sure of comfortable quarters and equally sure of a good day on the mountain. Here in the depth of this narrow pass we are already at an altitude of 1974 feet above sea level, yet the birds are all here. A matter of a few thousand feet one way or another does not worry them in the slightest. On the margin of the wood the Olive-backed Thrush sings, farther away toward Echo Lake you may hear the Hermit, the Black-throated Green Warbler overhead is still murmuring about the trees, and the Purple Finch warbles in a spruce beside us.

“Now for the trail on Lafayette. I shall allow a full three-hour climb for that, and I warrant you before we are halfway up you will hear the music-box tinkle of the Winter Wren besides a dozen other songs far more familiar. The trail leads under the brow of the precipitous Eagle Cliff which towers 3446 feet above the sea. Here sings the Blackpoll and Myrtle Warbler, and though I have no facts sufficient to prove my conviction correct, I firmly believe the rather rare bird called Lincoln’s Finch nests at the

base of this cliff near the shore of Echo Lake; for there some years ago a shy bird suddenly appeared which I easily might have mistaken for a Song Sparrow had I not caught sight of his ocher-yellow breast—that settled it; his name was unquestionably Lincoln! The books say a broad, cream-buff band extends across his breast, the white underparts are finely streaked with black, and the sides are tinged with cream-buff. No doubt this was an individual who with several others of his kind had remained in that spot in the spring migration. The bird is far more apt to be found in the autumn among the weeds on the meadowlands along with flocks of Song Sparrows. He journeys far north of us to the wildernesses of Ungava and Keewatin. He is very shy and his song in this part of the country is all but unknown; it suggests the babbling melody of the Wren with the tones of the Song Sparrow; all we usually get from him is a conversational *zip, zip, zip*, like that of the Chipping Sparrow. He is a summer resident of the Adirondack and White Mountain regions, but as a rule, he passes on north and away northwest to the Yukon Valley. Mr. Torrey wrote of this Sparrow that ‘he showed a blotch, a running together of the dark streaks in the middle of the breast, a point very characteristic of the Song Sparrow.’ But I am

**Lincoln's  
Finch**

convinced that he must have seen the dark, almost black bases of the downy breast feathers beneath, caused by displacement of the gray-white surface feathers above. I have never seen any museum specimens which showed a surface blotch. There is a wee bit of a black mark on the breast of the Tree Sparrow; you see him now and then as we pass up the mountain, but you could not possibly get these two Sparrows confused, they look entirely different.

‘It is a strenuous climb above the Eagle Cliff ridge, slowly we are leaving the crowded forest behind us, the birds are becoming fewer, and the Winter Wren is rippling a cheery farewell with regrets; ‘Au revoir,’ he jingles, ‘if you will climb that barren peak we part company!’ Never mind, doubtless there will be several Juncos when we reach the barren rocks who will step forth to greet us. It is an easier line of march as soon as the upper level above the Cliff is reached; this is the base of the main ridge. From here the ascent is gradual to a point where the path is steep again and soon we reach another plateau in the hollow of which lie the little tarns called the Eagle Lakes. The water is brackish and boggy but sweet and cool, and there, I am sure we will find a few birds. Among the dwarf spruces are the Bicknell Thrushes who love to nest in just such an impenetrable wilderness as this; I would scarcely relish the effort of



searching so dense a jungle with the hope of finding Mrs. Bicknell at home. I am content to stick to the trail and climb to the accompaniment of the Thrushes' music. We started out with the Hermit and the Olive-back and we finish with the Bicknell; a brass band couldn't keep pace with us, the birds would beat it in the first lap! They are already here at the lakes ahead of us. Lonesome as the surroundings appear to be, they are yet sufficiently attractive to make 'skylight' homes for the wilderness-loving recluses of the bird world. The wonder is that they find enough to eat up so high in the air. But make no mistake about that, we may be devoured ourselves with black flies, mosquitos, midges, and flying ants before we get through with our mountain climbing this summer; there's enough in the air alone of the mountain tops for the birds to grow fat upon.

"I hear the Pine Grosbeak; his song is similar to that of the Purple Finch—music peculiarly winning and persuasive. We will lunch here near the tarn, and I have an idea some of the birds will invite themselves to join us. Look! the Tree-Sparrow is already curious to know what a ham sandwich is. Eggs, hard-boiled, all gold and white are also a tempting puzzle. Scarcely a halt of ten minutes and there are three applicants around a napkin tablecloth spread on a bit of ancient granite

margined by clusters of Greenland arenaria not yet in bloom. Mr. Sparrow draws near enough to capture a few crumbs in tempting display three feet from the table. He may yet pluck up courage to come to your hand. There are now not less than six pensioners in sight. Two Juncos and a Bicknell are scrapping with each other for front seats. Now pipes up the White-throat, he will sing for his luncheon. He still sticks to the figure three! *I'll take three sandwiches, sandwiches, sandwiches.* Nothing modest about that announcement!

But softly! here comes a big, gray-coated fellow boldly flashing his wings in our very midst; it is the **Canada Jay**, cousin of the Blue Jay, sometimes called the Whisky Jack. In the winter he makes himself at home with the lumbermen and at dinner-time often helps himself directly from their plates. He is a brazen-faced scalawag who will surely come to your hand for a crust. 'Now,' he says, 'here's my chance. Three bits of bread in one hand will soon be three bits of bread in one bill. The other fellows may stand back and look on, I'm able to help myself—and he does! Not content with one crust he is trying to crowd three in his beak at once. See the assurance with which he grasps your thumb with one foot, stands in your palm with the other and deliberately works



Canada Jay



over those crusts. Now he has two in his bill and is off to the spruces behind us. He will return for the other bit and get it unless the Tree Sparrow looks sharp! But the Sparrow is a bit shy, he dallies a while with many a flip of wing and tail, cocks his head, and at last makes the desperate venture. He has it! No one says 'thank you' in the woods—you have to take that for granted. It is one of the refinements of society which scarcely leaves the mountain trail. Aha! back comes Mr. Jay of Canada too late for the crust; give him another. He is not unattractive in appearance; a black head, dull white forehead, white throat, gray back, breast, wings, and tail. He is a bird of the far northern woods, breeding from Mackenzie to northern Quebec, and southward to Maine and Minnesota. The bulky nest is lodged not very high in an evergreen tree and is built of twigs, bark, rotten wood and grasses lined with softer materials, catkins, etc. The three or four eggs are dull gray thickly speckled with brown and madder purple. The bird nests extremely early—in March generally, and by the first of June the young birds are flown. He is quite common about the lumbermen's camps in winter, and the men no doubt gave him the name of Whisky Jack. Why I do not know, unless by experiment they found he liked bread soaked in whisky! But some of the

lumbermen are greatly attached to the winter birds which under cautious and kind treatment become very tame. Frank Bolles, in his delightful little book *At the North of the Bearcamp Water*, tells of a lumbercamp cook, who, during a severe storm of winter snow and sleet, sheltered the birds in his cabin. 'I just opened my doors,' he said, 'and called and whistled to my birds, and in they came, dozens of 'em until every beam and perch in the camp was full of 'em. Among the number were many Cross-bills.

The journey to the summit should not be delayed longer; there is yet more than an hour's climb over the roughest, rockiest part of the trail, and we will meet few birds on the way."

The toilsome climb of a mile and a half was soon over and behind the shelter of a group of jutting rocks on the cool, wind-swept summit the travelers rested awhile and gazed through the broad blue expanse upon all the world spread out in billowy mountains and far-reaching valleys below. The pale lilac-pink, rocky peaks of the Mt. Washington Range to the east, the blue ridge of the Green Mountains, Mt. Mansfield, and Camel's Hump in the far west, and beneath, the vast, storm-scarred ravines glittering here and there with thin silvery streams, formed a grand panoramic picture which was a joy beyond words for Boy Blue, an experience rather than a



mere picture, which would remain with him for all his life. A few Juncos flitted about on the summit, and now and then some large bird too distant for identification flew across one of the ravines. The glasses revealed one Chicken Hawk without question, but nothing more.

"A number of species may cross the ridge, no doubt," said Parter, but the large majority remains in the valleys. There are two or three Pine Grosbeaks beside the Eagle Lakes and quite a number of Bicknell Thrushes have taken possession of the stunted spruces in the vicinity; these, the Juncos, Tree Sparrows, and a few of the Warblers seem to be the only birds who care for this mountain wilderness, but the summit at an altitude of 5260 feet has no attractions for them, they decidedly prefer to nestle in the shelter of the rocky mountain's shoulders.

What a wonderful moving picture show the mountain affords, cloud and sunshine, valleys filled with singing birds miles of unbroken forest, the gloom of thunder clouds and the flash of lightning and at your feet the listening, peaceful world, which, though it looks so, we know is quite the reverse beyond the horizon. One drinks in the life-giving air and heaves a grateful sigh with the thought that never shall the horrid grind and roar of the stifling

city push its ugly tracks and roadways into these exalted heights. Now, Boy Blue, birds and all don't you think this a better show than the movies?"

"Well," came the prompt reply, "it is like this, Parter, you ask whether I prefer the real thing to a cheap imitation. You know my choice!"

"I do," responded Parter, "now we will bid farewell to the mountain, and you may return home with the glorious conviction that you possess a goodly portion of a new world, or at least a grand and extensive view of it which will prove to be a life-long blessing, and of that no one may dispossess you!"

## CHAPTER X

### ON THE RIVER IN JULY (PART I)

“WHEN the early part of July arrives,” said Parter, “one might suppose the birds would be quite sung out, that the fine frenzy of song of the mating season which the ornithologists learnedly and authoritatively discuss would be over—but no! It entirely depends upon the region where the bird is, his environment and his nature, whether he still sings or not. Wherever there are forests of spruce, hemlock, and fir, there we will find species which will sing late in the season because the season itself is late. In the more northern States many of the species continue in song until the end of the first week of August. In the fastnesses of the mountains the White-throated Sparrow and the Thrushes—particularly the Hermit Thrush—pipe along until that time has passed; but the gradual slackening of bird-song is very evident from the twentieth of July until the middle of August when it practically ceases. This is the rule in the White, Adirondack, and Green Mountains, and the Canadian Wildernesses. You may question why

the bird should cease singing at all, the caged Canary does not excepting during the time of moulting; but the wild bird, his nesting habit in the spring season, his choice of a mate and the rearing of the young, his food, and his migrations in the spring and autumn, are all imperative, natural conditions very different, indeed, from the artificial ones of the caged bird, and they largely control his song. The Canary is not compelled to work for his living, his seed and water cups are filled by loving hands. He is alone, and has nothing to do but amuse himself with song. If he escapes from his cage and does not find his way back he is done for! Incapable of finding the food he requires, unable to associate with those of his kind, many of which would be his enemies, unfitted for migration, he is sure to face destruction as soon as the first storm or frost overtakes him. Out on the wide world, away from the accustomed comforts of his cage, his surroundings strange and distracting, he cannot sing. On the other hand, in his natural environment the wild bird revels in his liberty, his own chatter, his music, and rivalry with his fellows when nothing distracts him—not even the whirl and noise of the very busy world. He sings to his mate, it is his strong, instinctive effort to attract her. He shows himself off, displays his brightest feathers and sings his finest song. His music is a wonderful

gift not yet fully accounted for in spite of what some scientists believe and have written to the contrary. His ends gained, food in plenty, and a family to help rear, he has no further inclination to sing—so he stops. We lose sight of him mostly because he is silent; how much we are dependent upon the song for knowledge of his whereabouts we do not appreciate until it ceases. There are times when he is instinctively quiet, motionless, and songless. I think that time comes when the young are flown and there is nothing else to do in the summer season but eat of the abundance of food provided by Nature.

“But the singing period is often prolonged by several species. The Whip-poor-will is at it all through June, July, and intermittently through August. He is an uncanny fellow who **Whip-poor-will** never perches in a tree, is content to squat on the woodpile or any other convenient somewhat elevated platform, and there pipe up when the sun is set and all other birds have gone to sleep, exerting all his lung power in a sound thrashing of the unfortunate Will. You would notice if you were within a hundred feet of him that there is a queer cluck that precedes each *whip* in the song; that is due to the drawing in of his breath. He will keep up his monotonous nocturne all through the night until about four in the morning, when,

fagged out and hoarse he gives it up. All this is done, of course, to attract another bird and when she appears he alters his time from *moderato* to *presto*; then he stops for a spell, but, as the Italians would say, *da capo!* the same thing over again, until one is convinced there is very little choice between the Whip-poor-will's song and that of the backyard Tom-cat of city fame.

“The bird has an extremely short bill, an enormous mouth with a gape from ear to ear, and whiskers, or bristles to assist in scooping up insects as he flies—for he feeds a-wing. His back is mottled with black, brown and ocher, a white crescent crosses his chest, and the outer tail feathers are white halfway up. In general color he matches with a toad remarkably well. The female builds no nest but deposits her two dull white, brown-speckled eggs on the forest floor among the dead leaves, trusting to luck that you will not step on them! When Mr. Eaton tells us he has taken thirty-six full-grown moths each one of which contained hundreds of eggs from the stomach of a bird which was killed early in the evening, you know just how valuable he is to the forester and the farmer. The territory of the Whip-poor-will extends from Manitoba to Nova Scotia and south to Georgia and Louisiana. It winters from the Gulf States to Honduras.



Whip-poor-will





“There is another bird, the Nighthawk, which so strongly resembles the Whip-poor-will that many people get the two mixed. Nevertheless, they are absolutely and distinctly separated species which, however, belong to the same **Nighthawk** family. It is true both birds have a white band on the throat, and each has a mottled brown and black coat, but the Nighthawk is distinguished by his much longer white-barred wings which expanded measure quite sixteen inches from tip to tip. This bird also captures its insect prey on the wing. But whoever could imagine the Whip-poor-will soaring to heights so great, and with flight so irregular and aimless? Only the Nighthawk is equal to such acrobatic feats; he circles and darts hither and thither, drops perpendicularly as if shot, finishes up with a noise like a fog-horn, regains his poise at the level of the tree-tops, and then circles again in another direction, all the while uttering a weird *Geep, geep, geep*, in tone like that of a big Jew's-harp. The fog-horn, booming noise is caused by vibrations of the long wing feathers which are brought with sudden resistance against the air. Like the Whip-poor-will, the Nighthawk builds no nest but generally lays its eggs upon some quiet and deserted hilltop, or in an old field; occasionally it will resort to the gravel roof of a town building, but that is rather rare. There are commonly two dull

white eggs speckled with brown, or gray of a lavender tone. Through July and August this is one of the commonest birds we see sailing through the sky at the setting of the sun and for quite a while afterward. Its territory extends from the Yukon and Newfoundland to the Gulf States; it winters far south from Brazil to Argentina.

“The Whip-poor-will’s notes are sufficiently melodious to be called songful, but those of the Nighthawk and the Crow certainly are not. One Crow might justly say the Crow’s calls were plain ‘jabber!’ The bird has great conversational ability, no doubt, but, so far, no one has ventured to interpret his language. I gravely suspect he is both quarrelsome and profane, for his vocabulary is decidedly violent at times; perhaps on that account he was long ago dubbed by the humorous farmer a Crocus! He is extremely wary and never ventures nearer my garden than a hundred feet or so; he does not propose to risk sampling its contents so long as a bare fifty feet separate it from the kitchen door! I have never been able myself to get nearer a Crow than forty feet, yet the confiding Chippy allows me to hoe in the garden within eight feet of him. There’s the difference between two very common birds, one is trusty, the other suspicious. The Crow, in a word, is a black character; but his blackness is iridescent, his

feathers closely examined in strong sunlight are full of purple and steely blue reflections. There is, however, one redeeming trait in his character; if he does steal the corn, and uproot the sprouting potato he also destroys cutworms, June bugs, and grasshoppers by the thousand. But the blackest side of him is revealed in his attacks upon the nests of song-birds, and his destruction of the eggs and young. The Crow inhabits the land from Mackenzie to Newfoundland and southward to the Gulf Coast. As he is a scavenger who can always find enough to eat wherever he happens to be, he stays on through the year and when spring comes caws derisively at the scarecrow as soon as it appears in the cornfield.

“Among the odd birds which can scarcely be called singers in the full sense of the word is the strange-voiced little Screech Owl whose total length is not over eight inches. He is a common visitor in the Pemigewasset

**Screech  
Owl**

Valley. His colors are a mixture of mottled grays and browns; sometimes there is what is called a red phase of the bird's coloring where a warm rusty red takes the place of the gray. As for his song, well, that is a sort of unearthly, blood-curdling warble, so strange and eerie that the goose-flesh creeps down one's back when one hears the quavering voice for the first time. *Whieu-u-u-u-u, ah-oo, ah-oo, ah-oo, ah-oo,*

he calls in a plaintive, musical whimper. Wilson, the old ornithologist, likened it to the whine of a half-frozen puppy. That is a fair comparison; but to my ear it suggests something more nearly like the hysterical cry of the poor settler's wife of old pioneer days who has narrowly escaped the bloody grasp of the wild Indian about to scalp her. This, however, is pure imagination, for the tremulous music in reality is a love song of springtime—the serenade of the little Screech Owl to his beloved. Perhaps he invites her to a special supper, a ragout of fat mice with a side dish of moths, both of which, I may add, he is quite fond of himself. This Owl builds its nest in a hollow tree, and lays four or five white eggs on the decayed wood and rubbish therein.

“With eyes almost closed, ear-tufts erect, and slinky body, the feathers of which are tightly compressed, his shapeless outline and gray and brown coloring so closely match the dead tree on which he is perched that your eyes can scarcely distinguish the point where the stump ends and the bird begins. He inhabits the land from Minnesota to New Brunswick and southward to Georgia and Texas.

“There is another Owl, but somewhat uncommon in our vicinity, which it would be well for you to know. You have already met the Screech Owl at twilight on the border of the wood and you may yet





Screech Owl



Indigo Bunting (upper figure)

Junco (lower figure)

meet the Great Horned Owl there too. If the light is sufficient you would see a large, motionless bird with erect ear-tufts, face disks of ocher-brown, large topaz eyes, a broad white patch on his throat, a coat of mottled brown, sepia black and ocher, and under parts of buff narrowly barred with black. He has been called the tiger among birds, and rightly so, for he is a destroyer of full-grown poultry, song-birds, small rodents, and even rabbits and skunks! The nest is in the hollow of an old tree generally in swampy woods; the two white eggs are laid from late February to the first week in April. He is a permanent resident wherever found, and inhabits the country from Wisconsin to Newfoundland and southward to Florida and Texas. His hoot is peculiarly deep-toned; with the change from winter's cold to the first mild day of spring comes his booming note across the greening hillside at dusk. *Who-oo, hoo-hoo-hoo, whoo, whoo.* It sounds like the last expiring groan of departing winter; but most likely it is another love song with still another invitation to dine, this time, on a hind quarter of skunk! Who can tell?

**Great  
Horned  
Owl**

"I think it would be a good idea to leave these hunting birds to themselves, and take a little trip up-river in the canoe this afternoon; we may see something

interesting on the wing. There is the broad blue sky above, the yellow sandbanks and the crystal river below, and the meadows and overhanging trees on either side; we must surely meet with a bird or two. We have not yet checked off every name on our list of one hundred and twenty-five species, and I am quite certain it will be possible to do that before we reach the end of our summer's study. Afloat we may chance upon the unexpected, and it is not difficult to stem the Pemigewasset's swift current when you know how to manage a canoe; the river bears its Indian name meaning the Crooked-mountain-pine-place. It is now late in the season of bird-song and many of the singers have left 'the stage' for their summer vacation—have closed their engagement, as it were! Life has become very easy for them and they have grown lazy with having plenty to eat and no work to do. Yet it is not so with all the species.

"Singers there are and many for all July and early August. Among the Finch family the American Goldfinch who is flying high over the river meadows now is one of the latest songsters. His chief occupation throughout the month of July seems to be an undulating flight through the deep blue sky—like the rolling waves of ocean—accompanied by a single chirping

remark at each dip. *Per-chick-o-ree, per chick-o-ree*, he sings as he sails through the broad blue, and one is reminded at once of the old hymn—

“Or if on joyful wing cleaving the sky,  
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I fly.

“That’s the bird, most surely, that must have put the idea in the poet’s head! The full song is a succession of jubilant, Canary-like chirps that bubble from his throat like champagne from a wine glass. His song seems to express the pure joy of living. He flies and sings, or he sits in the tree chirruping long rhapsodies to his wife on the nest thus entertaining her while she is busy, perhaps doing the housework and washing the dishes! But it is evident he cannot work and sing too, so I suspect his specialty is a day-long song and dance performance with family cares thrown to the winds.

“The Goldfinch is an inhabitant of eastern North America from Manitoba to Newfoundland and southward to northern Georgia, Arkansas, and eastern Colorado. In winter it flies as far south as the Gulf Coast. It is a common resident of New York and New England all through the winter, at which time the plumage of the male bird is exchanged for soberer tints of greenish gray and olive with darker wings and tail. The bird is one of the latest in nesting; in

one instance eggs have been found in the nest on the sixteenth of August. The nest, five to twenty feet up in a tree, is woven of fine grasses and shredded bark lined with cotton grass and thistle-down. The eggs are blue-white. The female generally has but one brood in a season. She is not especially timid, for one time, many years ago, she allowed me to approach so close while she pulled the downy seed from a fall dandelion with which to feed her young, that with cautious approach and movements I was able to stroke her down the back.

“A rather near relative of the Goldfinch and a bird quite as beautiful, though of entirely different coloring, is the Indigo Bunting. His plumage is an iridescent greenish blue like that on the neck of the Peacock.

The head is ultramarine blue, the back and breast a brighter, greener tone, and the wings and tail black edged more or less with blue. Among all the singers of July this Bunting is the most cheery and tireless; his song is easily recognized for it bears a close resemblance to the chirping notes of the Canary without any of the trills. He sits at the top of a spruce or young birch and pours forth a series of ringing, swinging chirps usually ending with about three staccato notes. Sometimes he, too, sings blithely on the wing. Through later spring and



early summer you may see the flash of his wonderful blue as he flies from tree to tree through some one of the valleys of the White Mountains. He is not very shy, for, twice you will recollect, he has flown to our piazza, perched for a few seconds on the railing, and with perfectly evident curiosity craned his neck at its occupants. There is a beautiful semi-precious blue stone called lapis lazuli from which the bright color called ultramarine is obtained which matches up with this Bunting perfectly. As the end of September approaches the bird will exchange his suit of blue for one of brown with blue trimmings; then he starts on his journey southward. The Indigo Bunting inhabits eastern North America from Minnesota to Nova Scotia and southward to the Gulf Coast. He winters in Central America. The nest may be found from two to four feet above the ground in tangles of brush or brier. The four eggs are bluish white; nests containing eggs are found from late May to early June and sometimes as late as the first week in August.

“One of the most delightful singers belonging to the same family is the Vesper Sparrow. He will sing along with the Song Sparrow until the end of July. You might easily mistake him for his relative if you did not know the songs and plumage were distinct-

**Vesper  
Sparrow**

ly different. He flies over the river bank and meadow, as I speak, and shows the white feather; on the roadway he will fly a bit ahead of you as you walk and again plainly display the white side-feathers of the tail. The Junco has white tail feathers, but not the Song Sparrow. In singing the Vesper begins with about four deliberate notes running up, and then finishes with several very rapid, chirping notes dropping down the scale; the Song Sparrow commonly begins with three emphatic notes of exactly the same tone. The Vesper is one of the sweetest songsters of the roadside and the dry field; his mottled colors suggest a Tweed suit of mixed browns, grays, and sepia black, with a touch of Venetian red at the shoulder, or bend of the wing, his dull gray-white breast is streaked with sepia and ocher. The territory of the Vesper Sparrow extends from Keewatin to Cape Breton Island and southward to North Carolina and eastern Nebraska. It winters from this southern boundary to the Gulf Coast, a few individuals remaining in the northern States through the winter. The nest, commonly placed upon the ground, is hidden amongst the grass and weeds; the four or five grayish eggs are flecked with umber and ruddy brown, and they are laid from late April to late July.

“There is still another member of the Finch family

hereabouts, but he does not often locate beyond the warmer part of the valley where the waste and scrubby land meets the river; this is the **Chewink** or Towhee. He likes sandy barrens, and the recovering greened-over conditions of devastated forest areas. His coloring is effective and strong; a hooded head and back of black, two small patches of white on the wings, the three outer tail feathers tipped with white the lower parts white bounded on the sides with Venetian red, and the eye distinctly red. His call note is a plainly whistled *Che-wink*, the first syllable short, and the second long with a double-toned buzzing effect. His full song is a sort of extension of this and has commonly been written *Chuck-burr, pill-a-will-a-will-a-will-a-will-a-will*. In other words, two clearly whistled tones and a final trill.

"In the springtime this bird is a strenuous digger for grubs in the tangled depths of the thickets, scratching with both feet at once and sending the dead leaves of winter flying in all directions. In this respect he would make a successful competitor with the Fox Sparrow. The nest, placed on the ground, is built of dried leaves, grasses, and plant fibers lined with finer grasses. The four white eggs are finely and evenly flecked with madder brown sometimes blotched about the larger end.

"The Chewink breeds from eastern Dakota to central Maine and New Hampshire and southward to the Gulf Coast. A few individuals remain through the winter in the vicinity of New York City. We have happened to catch a glimpse of him from our canoe, but I can assure you he is by no means a common bird of the Pemigewasset Valley."

## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE RIVER IN JULY (PART II)

“AHA! ‘up in the air so blue,’ Mr. Crow is in trouble; look quickly with your glass and you will see he is chased by Mr. Kingbird; I wonder whether he has been into mischief. One **Kingbird** of the chief defenders of our apple orchard is the Kingbird, and this one was perched a moment ago in yonder wild apple tree on the watch, I suspect, for that Crow; he is his deadly enemy. As soon as a Crow comes near the garden or the orchard he is after him; up he flies in the air like a rocket, poises a fraction of a second, and then as rapidly descends in the direction of the enemy; if he misses him he is at it again, always wary of the big ebony bill. Down he plumps directly on the Crow’s back and with repeated dagger-like thrusts of his sharp bill gives the Crow some of the unhappiest moments of his life. Both birds have disappeared now amongst the distant trees. I have never seen the big bird make a counter-attack, how could he? The Kingbird is infinitely more agile than he, and fly where or how he

may the little bird has him at his mercy dropping upon his back as a harpoon lunges at the hulking body of a whale. The only escape for the Crow is to take to the woods, for when he perches in a tree the Kingbird will abandon his attack. Birds are peculiar about that, the smaller one will let the larger one alone in a tree, even though a half dozen have joined in the attack; but let the big fellow fly and he will be chased from Dan to Beersheba. I have seen a Hawk chased by a Kingbird for the better part of a mile before the big dunce made for the shelter of the woods.

“Like all other members of the Flycatcher family the Kingbird captures his prey awing. Flies, beetles, bees, moths, grasshoppers, and insects of all kinds are not safe if they fly within range of his eye. Immensely nimble and fleet of wing the precision of his swooping dive is most extraordinary; none of his prey escapes. He is said to be a dangerous enemy of the honey bee, but I do not know about that; Mr. Eaton says the examination of stomachs shows that the bird invariably prefers the drones to the workers. I’m not surprised, for, you know, the drone is stingless, and the Kingbird is too wise to risk a case of appendicitis! He is a distinguished-looking bird with sooty black upper parts, the tip of the tail is margined with white, the head has a little patch of brilliant orange feathers which flashes into view only



when the bird is roused or excited, the wings are blacker than the rest of the body, and the lower parts are grayish white. He is not a singer; what voice he has is decidedly cracked. His remarks are maudlin, and might be interpreted as *Ker-rip, ker-rip, quirp, kerr-kerr-kerr* a loudly squawking whistle mostly double-toned. He is gentle in his home, but, as his name *Tyrannus* implies, is a tyrant among other birds, for he allows no one, man, bird, or beast to come near that home without making it hot for them! he usually launches a furious attack on the intruder. The Kingbird breeds from Mackenzie, British Columbia, and Newfoundland southward to Florida and New Mexico. He winters from southern Mexico to British Guiana and Bolivia. The compact nest is usually built well up in the apple tree; it is woven with straw, grasses, weeds, and rootlets, and is lined with hair, bits of cotton grass, and wool. The four white eggs are flecked with umber brown.

“There is a Hummingbird probing the depths of the freckled Jewel-weed dangling over the bank. Evidently he does not despise an occasional wild flower. This little Ruby-throat, although you would never suspect he possessed such a character, is one of the most fearless and pugnacious of all our familiar birds. A daily visitor of the

**Ruby-  
throated  
Humming-  
bird**

nasturtiums, scarlet runners, and sweet peas of our garden, you would not call him a prize fighter, but I fear he deserves the name. A great point of success with a fighter is his ability to run away. The Hummingbird can do that with the swiftness of an arrow. You cannot see his wings unless they are folded against his body. The rapidity of their motion which enables the bird to poise motionless in mid-air is difficult to understand; it varies from 600 to nearly 1200 beats to the minute. The hum is equivalent to the note D in the second octave of the piano below middle C. The swiftness of the flight is proportionally great, that is, from 25 to 50 miles an hour. I said he was brave and a fighter. He will dart like an arrow at any bird no matter how large it is and drive it from the vicinity of his home. Jay Bird, Hawk, and Crow he attacks without hesitation and so suddenly that the birds are completely disconcerted though I have never seen him actually strike one of them. He is so fearless that he has perched on a bunch of flowers held in my hand and has preened his feathers—if I remained motionless—for the duration of nearly a whole minute, a long time for such a nervously active little creature! He has sipped sugared water from a tumbler in which was placed a nasturtium for a decoy as it was held in the hand of one of our ornithological friends of Shelburne,



Humming Bird



The Hummingbird and Mr. Walter Deane, Shelburne, N. H.

From a photograph by Miss L. M. Brown

on the other side of the mountains Another friend of Jefferson writes, 'When I had gathered a bunch of sweet peas in the garden a Humming Bird came in his usual hurried visit to the row and lit upon the bunch in my hand, repeating this several times and making no discrimination between the plucked and the growing flowers.' Mr. Bradford Torrey relates that he found a company of these birds flying crisscross over the summit of Mt. Washington on the seventeenth of June in 1884. So you see the Hummingbird by no means chooses a warm climate for either his home or his excursions.

Many times when I have been training the scarlet runners in my garden he has approached and sipped from blossoms within six inches of my busy, moving hands, then there has been ample opportunity to study his colors; they are an iridescent, metallic, olive and yellowish green, the wings and tail are brown, and the male bird has a dull ruby-red gorget, sometimes, according to the angle of the sun's rays, showing a coppery gold tone; below this throat patch the feathers are gray-white. The female has no ruby color on her throat. The nest is a tiny structure saddled upon a branch not larger than one's wrist, perhaps; in appearance it resembles a hump of gray and greenish lichens covering a knot on the bough; within there is a lining of soft cotton grass and

other fine material; it will usually contain two tiny white eggs a trifle less than half an inch in length. The nest is begun about the first week of June, toward the end of the month the eggs are hatched, and in about sixteen days more the young are ready to leave the nest; Mr. Eaton says ten days, and Mr. Torrey writes of a particular young bird, 'he is now on his twenty-first day in the nest.' So you are at liberty to estimate what the average time may be. I am convinced that Mr. Torrey's bird was a slow youngster. The young birds are fed by the method of regurgitation, the mother perching on the rim of the nest, ramming her long bill down the open throat of her offspring—all the way down, if you please, so the operation looks like infanticide—and in this 'murderous' fashion pumping the contents of her crop, insects and all, into his greedy gullet. If it wasn't the case that we human beings—some of us—were a bit exacting about the proper use of knives, forks, and spoons, we might consider the mother bird's methods less barbarous, but at present we must admit the table manners of Pelicans, Herons, and Hummingbirds are vulgar to the point of hilarity! But whoever would suppose the dainty Hummer deserved to be excluded from the circle of refined and polite bird society?

"There is one bird, however, that we are justified





Cowbird's egg in the nest of the Chewink

From a photograph by H. W. Weiserber



in debarring from this select circle; that is the Cowbird who associates with the cattle. I am glad to say he is practically unknown

**Cowbird**

in the more elevated valleys of the White Mountains, though he has been observed in the pasture land of the Connecticut River Valley. But you would find him in the warmer State of New Jersey without difficulty. He gets his name from his intimate friendship with the cow; he alights on her back and relieves her from troublesome insects, which, it must be admitted, is a scarcely refined occupation somewhat objectionable in polite society.

"But the Cowbird is a useful individual, or would be, if the usefulness were not counterbalanced by evil irresponsibility. The objectionable side of the the bird's character is the habit of depositing its eggs in other birds' nests; that results in depriving us of three or four useful as well as beautiful song birds. Mr. W. Hamilton Gibson records an instance of an extraordinary Yellow Warbler's nest three stories high, so built in an effort to avoid the persistent endeavor of the Cowbird to have her eggs hatched out by someone else—the disgraceful, lazy thing!

"The Cowbird is a walker, not a hopper; you would recognize him by that fact and by his coffee-brown—rather bronze-sheened—head, neck, and breast; the rest of the plumage is glossy black. He is a near

relative of the Blackbirds, but a disreputable one which merits little respect and gets little from the rest of the bird world. His territory extends from Mackenzie to Keewatin and New Brunswick and south to North Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, and northern California. He winters from southern New York to the Gulf Coast.

“A very near relative of the Cowbird but an entirely different character, a bird so rare up here that I have seen him only once on the intervalle  
**Bobolink** we are passing and that was many years ago, is the Bobolink. The reason is, the valley lacks continuous, wide-spreading, sunny meadows. It is true the river winds through a few broad intervalles and on these a stray Bobolink may appear in the course of the early summer season, but such a happening is certainly rare. On the other hand he is present on the Jefferson meadows away to the north, on the so-called ox-bow of the Connecticut to the west, and on the broad meadowland of Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey.

“The Bobolink’s colors are a jet black with many edgings on the wings and back of buffy white, on the back of the neck is a broad patch of buff, and on the wings and the root of the tail dull white.

“The bird is early to arrive and early to leave. By the middle of July his song is heard no more. The

poet, Bryant cleverly expresses the opening rhythm of the song with his trisyllabic name:

“Bobolink, Bobolink,  
Spink, spank, spink.

It is one of the wildest of jingles, beginning in moderate waltz time, with four or five well-sustained notes, then rapidly increasing in energy and tempo, and finally breaking loose in a rollicking, ‘tumble-down-dick’ scattering of high-pitched tones which remind one of a music-box gone wild by reason of a broken escapement. He promises well in the beginning but goes all to pieces before he reaches the end of his tune.

“The Bobolinks join in flocks as the season advances and in September congregate as gleaners in the grain fields. It is a very well-established fact that the rice fields of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Louisiana suffer great losses in the time of the fall migration. It has been estimated by the Biological Survey that millions of dollars in damage is done to the rice crops by the birds which, in the southern States, are called Rice-birds. The female cleverly misleads anyone who would discover her nest hidden in the meadow grass by artfully running from it and rising many feet away. The nest will hold from five to seven pale gray eggs thickly blotched and lined with chocolate

brown and madder purple. As in the case of the Meadowlark many nests and families are destroyed by the mowing machine which nowadays cuts the grass earlier than it was cut in former times. The bird breeds from British Columbia to Cape Breton Island and south to New Jersey, West Virginia, Illinois, and Utah. It is most abundant in the valleys of the Alleghany Mountains. It winters beyond the equator as far south as Paraguay.

“Another bird whose song comes rippling down to the bank of the river from the old red farm houses on the knoll above us I consider very rare in the northern reaches of this valley. It is the little House Wren. For many years the song has not been heard north of the town of Plymouth and I assume a succession of three severely cold spring seasons were accountable for that; the bird draws the line at extreme weather, yet in Jefferson, a region quite as cold as this, he is reported as a fairly common summer resident.

“In a general way the Winter Wren replaces the House Wren in the mountain regions of the northern States, but on the mountain or in the valley neither Wren is a common occurrence. The House Wren, darker in coloring than the other bird, is a mottled cinnamon brown, ocher, and sepia. He carries his tail erect if in an excited state of mind, yet when





Bobolink



Barn Swallow

Purple Martin

singing the little fellow commonly allows it to droop. The song begins with a few grinding, grating tones as of large pebbles rubbed together, this is succeeded by a high trilling note and then others which rapidly tumble down the scale to the lowest tone of all; it sounds like the silvery gurgle of a mountain brook, but it lacks the clear tones of the Winter Wren's song. Nevertheless, the same cheeriness and exuberance of spirit characterizes the music of this less gifted singer. The bird often shows a strange disposition at the time of nest-building to carry large-sized twigs to the hole in the apple tree or that of the bird house with the idea of forcing them inside! This Mr. Eaton seems to think is done with the deliberate intention of excluding other inquisitive visitors from the nest; but I question the means to the end, for the more reasonable theory would be that the twig would help make a firm foundation for the nest. But there is no doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Wren are quite pugnacious and equally capable of guarding their nest from evil-minded intruders, one of which is the English Sparrow. If all Wren house entrances were an inch in diameter the enemy could not get in.

"The swift-flying birds which are circling overhead and the long row perched on the telegraph wires yonder are Barn Swallows. Their home you may be

sure, is in this nearby red barn. It is always easy to recognize the specie by its very deeply forked

tail; no other members of the family have tails so distinctly pronged. This

**Barn  
Swallow**

Swallow's upper parts are an intense steely blue, the forehead chestnut, the throat and chest lighter chestnut, and the underparts paler yet; the tail when fully expanded shows a broad band of white.

"Observe the wonderful ease and skill of its swinging flight as it skims swiftly and low over the meadow in chase of insects which it captures always near the ground. No other Sparrow flies so low, none other is so cheery and lively a twitterer. It plasters its mud nest upon the rafters and the tie-beams of the barn and sallies forth for its daily living into the outside world through the wide open door or any other convenient aperture. The nest is lined with soft grasses and hen's feathers, within it you would find about five white eggs thickly speckled with red-brown and lilac. The Barn Swallow inhabits nearly all of North America from Alaska to Ungava. It winters in Central and South America, and remains in the North sometimes as late as the middle of October.

"There is another common and interesting member of this family called the White-breasted or Tree

Swallow who ventures as far north as Labrador and Alaska and winters from South Carolina southward. It is one of the most abundant birds of the marshy shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie. It arrives in this part of the country in early April before the snow is off the ground and leaves as late as the end of September. Along the coast it will remain almost up to the first of November, and in the autumn congregates by the thousands among the sand dunes of Ipswich, Massachusetts. Its colors are steely blue or dark blue-green above, and a uniform white beneath. This Swallow prefers to live in the vicinity of the water, and it locates in certain wide reaches of this river where dams have been erected for lumbering purposes. The nest is usually in the hollow of an old tree, or in the deserted nest of a Woodpecker, or sometimes in a convenient bird house. The eggs are white. The Swallows like the Warblers migrate mostly in the night.

**Tree  
Swallow**

“There is a Spotted Sandpiper ahead! he is walking hurriedly along the beach, pitching and bobbing his body up and down as a little boat breasts the waves of the sea. His absurd way of teetering and bowing as he runs across the sand whistling his pathetic two notes, *Peet-tweet, peet-tweet*, is his unmistakable mannerism.

**Spotted  
Sandpiper**

No other beach promenader hereabouts does just that thing. His colors are a mixture of brown and gray finely barred with black, over all is a metallic, greenish luster; the underparts are white with conspicuous large sepia brown spots on the breast, and very small ones on the throat. The nest is built in the tall grass and weeds of the shore, and it should contain about four or five cream white or pale buff eggs thickly spotted with chocolate brown. This Sandpiper ranges northward to the shores of Hudson Bay and southward to the Gulf Coast. It winters in Brazil, and is the one shore bird of the coast which ventures far inland to the sandy margins of our lakes and rivers, remaining sometimes as late as the first week of October.

“Now we are going to raise a great commotion in that duck family as we round the point, but we will proceed carefully and noiselessly; it is the American  
**American Sheldrake** Sheldrake, and we can already hear surprised and agitated remarks going on about a hasty retreat. Let's make a sudden spurt ahead! Wah-hoo! Yo-ho! There they go with the rush of an express train, thrashing the water with wings and feet into a maelstrom of swirling foam. If we meet them again it will be a quarter of a mile upstream. The Sheldrake is a useless, fishy duck which pursues and captures its prey under





Spotted Sandpiper



Loon

water and makes its home on the shores of many of our secluded mountain rivers and ponds. Its head and upper neck are greenish black, the back of the neck and shoulders of the wings white, the back black the tail ashen gray, and the underparts white delicately tinged with salmon. When the bird has completely risen from the water its flight is strong, rapid, and straight. It breeds from Minnesota and southern New Brunswick northward, and winters from Kansas, Illinois, and Maine southward to South Carolina.

“Our handsomest and largest water-bird of the mountain wilderness and lakes is the Loon or Great Northern Diver. As far as I know it has never visited this river but many years ago it made its home on the shore of a little lake to the southwest of us called Loon Pond. There is abundant proof at the present time that it nests on the Shores of Squam and Winnepesaukee Lakes. Its colors are a beautiful combination of black and white; the upper parts, wings, tail, and particularly the neck are black with iridescent reflections, a broad band back of the neck and a patch under the throat are white, the back and wings are finely barred black and white, and the breast and underparts are white. From tip of bill to tip of tail the bird will measure quite thirty inches.

**Loon**

"The Loon is a most extraordinary diver; he will instantly and noiselessly disappear in the lake when alarmed and swim sometimes a full quarter of a mile under its surface before he rises to take breath! On the surface he will rush with the speed of a steamboat and strike the water with his powerful wings in a most tumultuous flight. The bird is so absolutely aquatic that it appears absurdly out of balance and clumsy on land; the legs are too far back to be of any service in walking or waddling—whichever way you choose to put it. When the female approaches her nest which is among the grasses and sedges near the water, she swims about near the margin with a little hesitation and uncertainty, twists her head about cautiously on the *qui vive* for a possible inquisitive enemy and then awkwardly shoves herself forward until she settles upon the two pale olive-brown eggs which lie in an almost imperceptible hollow in the bank.

"The feathers on the body of the Loon are so thickly overlapped and matted that sportsmen say shot can scarcely penetrate them, and unless the head is struck nothing happens. The call note of the bird is the most weird and melancholic bit of music I have ever heard; it is a close crowding together of three tones running up the scale and resembling the cracked voice of an imperfectly controlled French horn. There is also another quavering note which makes the cold

shivers run down your back! it sounds like distant derisive laughter; in either case you would feel perfectly sure the Loon was in a very unhappy state of mind—but that would be your own point of view not his. To tell the truth, the tremulous notes are his love song! The breeding ground of this species extends from northern Illinois, Minnesota, and northern New England northward to the Arctic Circle; it winters from the southern line of this range to the Gulf Coast.

“In early April and again in the fall there is a likelihood of seeing, if you are on the watch for it during the migratory period, the Canada Goose. He wings his flight high overhead up and down this valley. The common sight of the V-shaped flock following its leader is one of the sure indications of the coming of spring in the Pemigewasset and Connecticut River valleys. The poet sings ‘The spring comes slowly up this way,’ and it certainly does when you find you have to chop the ice away from the water cut-off of the cottages on the first day of May! Yet the Canada Goose takes his chances with the ice and comes north just the same. It is on record that some years ago the bird flew over the region of Jefferson with feathers so loaded down with ice from a recent storm that the flight of the flock as a consequence was necessarily low

**Canada  
Goose**

and greatly retarded. Mr. Spaulding of Lancaster which is far to the north of us, says, 'often small flocks of the Canada Goose remain about Lancaster for a few days, feeding on the Connecticut meadows.'

"The long neck of the bird as it flies is an unmistakable point of identification. The head and neck are black, the tail is black with white at the base, the back and wings are brown, and the underparts gray-white. When on the wing the Goose gives an occasional *Honk, honk*, and though he flies swiftly the waving of the wings appears to be quite deliberate.

"Now we must turn about and paddle swiftly down stream with the Red-eyed Vireo's rippling song on either hand keeping time with the dancing waves which hurry over the pebbly shallows. I think that bird intends to keep it up all summer! Let him; we shall all be the happier for the music and the dancing water. Soon we reach the boat-landing and must bid the canoe and the river adieu. We stop, but the river? Well, Robert Louis Stevenson put it correctly, for a few miles farther down are the grinding mills of Livermore Falls and

"On goes the river  
And out past the mill;  
Away down the valley,  
Away down the hill."



## CHAPTER XII

### WINTER BIRDS (PART I)

It was an unusually cold winter. The snow, the ever deepening snow extending in broad reaches everywhere as far as you could see up and down the valley, was bounded only by the broad forest belt of the southern Franconia Hills. The distant slopes covered with dark spruces showed just enough lavender-gray and indigo-blue to make the white look, if possible, still whiter. There was a deadly stillness in the frosty air unbroken by a sparrow's chirp, or even the shivering rustle of a withered leaf.

"Where are all the winter birds one reads about in the books?" asks Parter, "Guess we will have to hunt them up; they don't mind this arctic cold. What does the thermometer have to say? The mercury has retreated almost to the little bulb at the bottom, to keep warm, maybe! Zero, is it? No, worse, five below! Three days ago, they tell me, the thin silver finger—or what was left of it—pointed to an awful forty degrees below, but before this in a venturesome spirit it had reached up to the tenth

degree above; indeed, it had even flirted with the teens when the sun beamed upon it, and one day when he wore a particularly broad smile it actually had warmed up to the twenties! There are times, of course when February and May get mixed up and a few gentle zephyrs attempt to cross the shining ice-bound intervals, but the treacherous mercury does not lift its finger to help and they get frozen halfway over! No country this for birds, no sign of life anywhere, you would think, but wait and see."

Even the white road looked deserted; nobody seemed to have any use for it. It had a shrunken, narrowed appearance as though it were afraid to go on any farther lest it be lost in the boundless waste of snow.

"It always does get lost in a snow-storm and the only way to find it is to dig it out with the snow-plow," explained Parter. "At best, under ordinary circumstances you would barely be able to trace its course over hill and dale by the two narrow tracks cut by the sleigh runners. No horse could travel between them; the snow is too deep. A one-horse sleigh always has the shafts attached directly in front of the left-hand runner and it is difficult to understand why it does not swing in a curve; but the tracks take care of that, it is hard work to get out of their clutches. The only time a sleigh

ever attempts to do so is when, after a heavy snow-fall, someone mismanages it by rashly driving on to the next turn-out (this being a regular institution always within sight) without looking to make sure no one else is ahead. But if there is someone else! Well, turn your own curve and see what happens. Scudge, crush, flump-pump,—dump and over you go! Horse, sleigh and all disappear in the snowdrift. Then all hands turn to and dig out. How? With shovels, of course, for no one leaves home without a shovel, it would be the height of folly to do so. But after all, is it such a very forbidding country for man or bird? Oh no. It has all things in plenty for both; sport for the sportsman, lumber for the lumberman, game for the hunter, furs for the trapper, wonderful, frosty scenery for the artist, and always food—including sugar—for those who are willing to work hard for it."

Parter with a few of the family had come up to their summer home for a winter's holiday. It was a promising opportunity for the sketching of snow-capped mountains and also for the study of winter birds which always flocked down from the far north in severe seasons. Boy Blue was well equipped with furs and snowshoes and eagerly looked forward to an outing over the crusted snowdrifts in search of new feathered friends. Already he had fastened

up two shelves for bird food, one at his own, the other at the dining-room window, but as yet only two Tree Sparrows and one noisy Jay had discovered them.

The winter day was still short, so, early in the afternoon, Parter, ready for his customary walk, put away brushes and palette and called in the language of Hiawatha to his grandson, "Get your mittens and your snowshoes, we will hasten to the forest over icy waste and snowdrift, where the Siskin and the Crossbill daily feed on weed and cone-seed."

It was short shift into fur coats and all the rest and in a few minutes the two were clipperty-clipping over the crusted snow in the direction of the woods, field-glasses at attention and pockets filled with inviting packets of canary, hemp, and sunflower seed, millet, granulated oats, wheat, and what not for hungry birds.

Parter remarked, "I know we must find birds up here somewhere and it is not so very far to go. We are on a sunny slope in the southern region of the White Mountains where nearly all the rarer birds come from the far north to seek food which may be more plentiful down here than where they belong—gleanings of grain left by the thrifty farmer, barnyards that promise generous left-overs in corn and oats intended for the animals, dooryards where a not over-new meal bag has trailed a sample of its contents

on the snow like an hourglass, not to mark time but to let the birds know there is always a measure of good things for everybody though it may be small. And they come? Certainly; wild as we think them they flock about the farm houses and prove quite sociable where even a negligibly small table awaits a feathered guest. Indeed, not a few accept many a coveted morsel from a friendly hand.

“Now for our feathered brethren of the arctic cold. We will tempt them with our pockets. I do not doubt many people think the few birds they see in winter live entirely upon what may be picked up in the vicinity of farms and village homes, but this is not the case; birds gather at any point where food is plentiful, and in sight, for snow buries a great deal. I suppose if I should tell you there is seed enough in this country outside our pockets to feed ten thousand birds you might think that an over-big story—but there is! Look in my hand.” Parter grasped a nearby stalk of the steeple-bush and shook it in his palm; it was instantly powdered with the tiny seeds. “There’s a sample for you, and remember, not only the Junco and Sparrow like these seed but the little ground squirrels—the chipmunks—too. Naturally the birds will be glad to get any seed we offer notwithstanding Dame Nature has scattered handfuls everywhere; but a large amount of her bounty is not

in plain sight. The birds have sharp eyes—hawk's eyes, you know, are terribly sharp—so you should not wonder that a little bird can see the seed in your hand at a considerable distance.

"In the course of our stay here we ought to find the Pine Siskin, Redpoll, Rosy Crossbill, and even the rare Evening Grosbeak. I was completely surprised when I spotted *him* from the car window the day we came up. There ought to be a fair chance of seeing him again on the slope of the hill yonder where the mountain ashes are; he is very fond of the berries. Sometimes these birds gather among the sumacs; even the strange fuzzy berries of these trees are acceptable to them and they do not despise the old frozen, shrivelled wild apple sticking to the tree; it is always the seeds that they are after——"

"And not the stale doughnut?" laughingly interrupted the boy, for the scalawag Blue Jay had carried off bodily the one he had fixed to an upright stick on his bird-shelf in such a way that the Tree Sparrow had to poke his head through the hole to reach the coveted hemp seed beyond. But Boy Blue, so far, had not succeeded in getting the much desired snap-snot with his camera.

"I don't know about that," rejoined Parter, "there are exceptions to all rules, and the Blue Jay is one. He has a taste for grease rather than seed,





PINE GROSBEAK



remember that, and then he is a ringleader in disorder, snaps his bill at rules, and takes the doughnut for a second reason—to test the trick at his own convenience.

“Here is a group of spruces ahead with signs of life in it. We must approach slowly and carefully. Ah! there is a bird now in full sight. Rosy you say—and a peach of a bird? You are right, your eyes are true to color, for the scarlet lake of his breast and neck are like the rosy cheek of the peach. That is the Pine Grosbeak. I hardly expected to see him though he is not as rare as the Evening Grosbeak; it was the other fellow I was looking for, but we will gladly take whatever comes. It is possible that we may succeed in inveigling him to eat from our hands, these northern birds are so fearless. What a splendid bit of warm red he is in contrast with these cold winter colors—gray of tree trunk, green of fir bough, and blue of snow shadow reflected from the heavens above all in jewel-like setting of silvery frost. But the rosy red is different, it is a joy to behold it awing, free, full of life and movement, here one moment, there the next.

**Pine  
Grosbeak**

“Now you may easily see the bird’s black tail, white wing-bars and broad, blunt beak; the sun beyond you and the bird in front is always the proper position

to observe colors. The little fellow is finding something to eat up there in the spruce boughs, buds probably, for there are no cones in sight and anyway, he does not go after them as the Crossbills do. One can never tell why birds peck at things, they may do it to exercise their bills which take the place of our own dexterous fingers and so satisfy an inborn inquisitiveness. There is another reason, too, if they didn't do it their bills would grow as big as New York! Look at the Toucan, he is a warning example to lazy birds. He lives upon the soft fruits of the tropics, opens his bill and lets them fall in—'twould be difficult to miss that bill, consequently it has grown so big that it has become equally difficult to tell what the bird looks like behind it.

"There, we have scattered seeds on the white snow and other Grosbeaks are coming. But something startles them and off they go. Never mind, they are keen-sighted as well as hungry and will return if we stand back a little and keep quiet. Drop more seed in a very thin trail, that is the better way. Here

come some other little fellows. What!

**Redpoll** Redpolls, and a lot of them too! Now they are sampling your canary seed and millet. It is a mystery to think whence they came. I never suspected any were near, yet here are as many as two score; a most pleasing surprise. How plainly you

can see the metallic crimson on their heads, some, too, are redder than others, their throats and breasts are stained with crimson pink, otherwise they resemble the Goldfinch in winter garb. Why! we are in bebies of birds; look! here come the Pine Grosbeaks again directly toward us. They have discovered your seed too. I think they will not be afraid of us now, hold out your hand and possibly some one of them may see the seed and fly to you. Do not move, stand like a statue nor change the position of your hand."

Very soon one of the birds in a nearby spruce tree flitted his way down from bough to bough, cocked his head nervously this way and that, whisked his tail, and with eyes intent on the outstretched, mittened hand evidently weighed the chances of a square meal with those of a newfangled trap. Parter anticipated the thought in a soft, quiet voice—"You're a fairly safe-appearing creature yet you may be some sort of a trap different from the one in the Hudson Bay country which caught my old enemy the furry weasel. I wonder if I can trust you? Yes—no! Gracious goodness! Those flitting, fidgetty Redpolls do make me nervous, why don't they stay quietly where they are? Now—I think I'll try it.' Thrup, thrup, rup-rup-rup. 'Here I am—never more surprised in my life; you're a friendly chap with a trusty eye,

that's sure. I'm not pressed for time and am as hungry as a bear, thank you, it won't take me long to finish up these seed.'

"Now, Boy Blue, I will snap my camera on you. What a picture you will make. The ladies will say, 'Oh the dear.' Careful, don't twist your mouth or giggle, on your life. What! Another Grosbeak? and on your shoulder too—well, well! Here goes, snap! I have you all three in the camera box. There, the other fellow is on your hand. What? scrapping and squeaking? that beats the Dutch! Whist! They're both gone. My! that was a squawk, it must have meant 'Thou tell'st me there's murther in mine eye.' The wicked creature, his face did wear an ugly look throwing out all consideration of the bill. That was too much for the Redpolls yonder, they've hurriedly said good-bye."

Boy Blue's face relaxed and a hearty laugh followed. "I'm just trying to imagine," he said, "what kind of a bird-fight it would be without the bill."

"Why, in the exact sense of the word," chuckled Parter, "a fight 'to save your face.' Now suppose we leave these fellows to scrap it out over the rest of the seed and hunt for the Evening Grosbeak, though it would be astonishing luck if we found anything more to-day. The mountain ashes on the slope of the



hill ahead of us ought to be favored some time or other by this bird's company.

"These winter birds are remarkable in some respects. It is surprising to learn that they do not really mind the cold, and in spite of the smothering snow still find enough food to keep themselves in plump condition. You noticed how chunky those Pine Grosbeaks were, they always seem to be well-fed, yet, you see, they are more than ready to accept something from your hand. The nourishing, nutty seed-food they get stores up an extra amount of fat on their little bodies; they are covered with a layer of it at least an eighth of an inch thick beneath the skin. This keeps them warm, and again, it tides them over a time which may come when, for some reason, three square meals a day are not in sight. There is, of course, something to be found far above the snow mantle among the trees tops which is very acceptable though it be nothing but frozen fruits and winter buds. But hark! I hear a chippering note, and we are close to the mountain ashes. I would not be surprised if we found the Evening Grosbeak yet. He looks a trifle like a large, short-tailed, stoutly built Canary but in many ways he is distinctly different. The horn-yellow bill is almost parrotlike, heavy, and broad; the top of the head is

**Evening  
Grosbeak**

black, the forehead and a broad band over the eye are yellow, the cheek and neck olive-brown, and the wings are marked with a large patch of white, the long feathers below this are sepia black; the tail is also the same brownish black. If the bird is a yellowish gray with black and gray wings it is the female. Now you know what to look for. . . These Grosbeaks belong in the far northwest; Alberta, Manitoba, and the Canadian Rockies, but they fly as far south in the winter as a line drawn from where we are now to Ohio and Missouri, or possibly to Kentucky. This happens to be a severe winter, and also, far more important as a cause of their wandering, their natural food in the far northwest is scarce, hence these little visitors from a far country are feeding in our mountain ashes.

“Go easy and keep your glass upon the ash tree. Yes, there they are three or four of them, white wing-patches and all as plain as the nose on your face. We certainly are in luck to-day! If those bills were hooked across one another one would know at once the bird was a female Crossbill, but even then the white patch now in sight is very different from the two wing-bars of the White-winged Crossbill. Female birds are most puzzling problems to the bird student, and young male birds are even worse, they look like many birds in general and no bird in particular.



EVENING GROSBEAK



PINE SISKIN  
(above)

REDPOLL  
(below)

"The Evening Grosbeaks are not uncommon during the winter in Minnesota and Michigan, but they are an unusual occurrence in New Hampshire. They may not be seen again here for several years. When the seed crop fails in the northwest the birds come down this way to feed on seeds of the box elder, on maple buds, mountain berries, and the fruit of the sumac. In the winter of 1916 there were considerable numbers observed all through the State from Well's River in the north, southward to Exeter, and in Washington County, Maine, they appeared for five years in succession, from 1914 to 1918. Listen, there is their metallic call—*clink, clink, clink*. They do not sing at this time of the year, but if they should remain, as sometimes they do until May, you might have an opportunity to hear a song similar to that of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, rather clearly whistled but not half so sweet. They are not a bit timid for you see they have allowed us to come quite close; this fellow busy with the berries is not more than ten feet away. So much for being carefully slow and guarded in your movements. But these northern birds are not afraid of you, the hunter with his gun they do not know, so why fly away. We will leave them with the old withered berries and call again another day; perhaps a few sunflower seeds sprinkled over the snow will help toward making this a food



resort, for birds soon learn to frequent the lunch counter. I have not the slightest doubt that in time your window shelves will receive a visit, and you may witness some lively Evening Grosbeak quarrels over close feeding quarters.

"I hear the saucy Chickadees beyond, so we must go to meet them." Parter whistled two clear notes.

**Hudsonian** *Phæ-be.* There was an almost immediate response of *Sic-a-dee-dee-dee-dees.*  
**Chickadee**

In another moment two or three inquisitive little birds were in the neighboring hemlocks watching the intruders with disapproving eyes.

"We will scatter a few seeds within sight and they may draw nearer." And Parter still whistled. "Come on, you little rascals, come on and 'git yo' meat,' as Uncle Remus says. Hello! What's this mean? What have we here? A little stranger with a brown cap on:—more, two brown caps with three black caps! This is a fine opportunity to see the two species of Chickadees together in full sunlight and study the differences. The rusty-tinged little brown caps, a northern species, are Acadians or Hudsonians. Our familiar black caps are a more southern species, and as far as looks go are certainly more attractive in their contrasting black, white, and grays. The Hudsonian looks as if he had spent the night in a nest of old rusty pine needles. His sides



quite up to his shoulders are a pale burnt sienna-brown—one of the common colors of my paint-box—his crown is a dark gray-brown, and his back an ashen brown; very different this from our Chickadee with black cap, black tie, and white collar up to his eyes on either side.

“We are sufficiently far north here to meet, occasionally, this rarer Hudsonian, for his home is in Canada and the cool ravines of the great mountains north of us, and he is always straggling southward in winter as far as Massachusetts and Connecticut in search of more food. We are down here in the Pemigewasset Valley, not in one of the ravines of either Lafayette or Washington, so these birds for the time being are our pensioners. Try your hand at it again, they are especially fond of Canary and hemp seed; crouch down cautiously, drop a half dozen seed beyond your snowshoes and they may see them. Hold out your hand with plenty in it and be everlastingly patient.” Parter continued whistling softly and confidently. Presently one bird and then another fluttered down and secured the seeds on the snow, but the outstretched hand was a more serious matter; at last an Acadian approached, poised over it half a second and retreated panic stricken when another came and brushed wings with him. Then both retired to the hemlock boughs to talk it over.

Finally after a few more timid flutterings the first bird scraped up enough courage to alight on Boy Blue's fur cap which luckily stayed on without exploding at the touch of Chickadee claws, and as it proved to have a commanding view of a perfectly unlimited feast of hemp seed, he threw caution to the winds, and in another instant was a bird in the hand in actual fact.

"You make quite an interesting picture with your Acadian friend," softly remarked Parter. "He is really not a bit more timid than the black cap, and possibly he may also appear on your food shelf some day; still, this is extraordinary luck. If three birds in the hand in one day are worth three score in the bush in three days, how much time will it take to scuffle home on snowshoes? Your bird has flown back to his companions with a seed in his bill, so let's return to the house before the mountain tucks the rest of the daylight under its arm, and the sun travels on to San Francisco."

## CHAPTER XIII

### WINTER BIRDS (PART II)

BEFORE long another day dawned with its brilliant blazonry of silver field and mountain crest, and over all a wonderful dome of sapphire blue. Parter used straight heraldry terms, calling it "a day in Argent and azure," silver and blue. "But," he added, "we will look for silver-gray birds rather than azure Bluebirds, or for that rare Acadian Chickadee which you entertained recently. I would like you to see more of him, if possible; he is very interesting. So off we go again clipping over the silvery, shining ice-crusted snow-fields in mittens and snowshoes, with, I fear, a small chance of meeting him again for he never stays long in one place. He is an eastern bird, not the true Hudsonian of the northwest whose home is in far Canada, Alberta, and Alaska. He is called *Penthestes hudsonicus littoralis*, a tough Latin title for so small a bunch of feathers, and a hard one for even a bright school boy to remember. But it's simpler when you know what it means; *Penthestes* is the surname, *hudsonicus* stands for the famous old Hendrick

Hudson, and *littoralis* means of the sea shore; hence, Mr. Penthestes who lives by the seaboard of Hudson's country. There are no less than seven distinct Chickadees: the Alaska, Carolina, Mountain, Mexican, Hudsonian or Acadian, Chestnut-backed, and our Black-cap. I wonder whether the seven different species have seven different notes? Probably they have, but no one, as yet, has made that clear. In one respect most of them are alike; they do not abandon their frigid homes in the north, but like Ralph Waldo Emerson's bird—

“Front the north wind in waistcoat gray,  
Head downward, clinging to the spray,  
In feats of their gymnastic play.

So sings the poet, pleased no doubt with the idea that his little ‘scrap of valor’ not only whistles *Phæbe!* *Chic-a-dee-dee*, but adds a latin *Weenee-wedee-wee chee*. A classic bird—perhaps a graduate of the Boston Latin School, who knows? You must read Emerson's lines to ‘The Titmouse,’ and settle that for yourself.

“If we do not meet that Chickadee again to-day, we may have luck enough to run across other interesting and peculiar bills—the Crossbills. These, and the Pine Siskin—the last a bird o’ stripes and freedom in no way related to the jail-bird of the prison in Sing Sing—are certainly among these hills, somewhere.

But the Siskin is one of those winter birds of which it would be difficult for me to say, he is here or there, and at such and such a time. In irregularity and in oddity of taste and costume he goes to the limit! I am not alone in this opinion, others think the same. A writer from British Columbia tells this"; and Parter consulted his note book: "Every settler's cabin here (in 1915) had its flock of from twenty to fifty birds accompanied by from ten to fifteen American Crossbills. All the Siskins seemed to want was salt and gravel; they never touched any dry salt, but ate the snow where dishwater had been thrown out. I poured brine over a half-rotten beech stump, and by spring they had eaten away half the stump.'

"My memorandum says, in the winter of 1909 large flocks of Siskins appeared in New York State, in 1912 and '14 flocks of fifty or more were frequently seen in and about Washington, D. C., in 1920 several smaller flocks appeared in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Yet in 1917 I did not see one; hardly any visited the White Mountain region where they should be plentiful almost any winter. Sometimes the bird flies as far south as Florida, and at other times it is almost unknown in New York State.

Here we are among the pine trees and in luck

**Pine  
Siskin**

again for I certainly hear the wheezy note of the little bird we are talking about. This is more than one should expect, yet the heavy blanket of snow is responsible for the appearance of nearly all the birds we have found, so far. 'Snow, snow everywhere and not a seed in sight,' would certainly be the burden of their song if they did sing at this time of year. There they are, whole 'bunches of them' with a few Goldfinches for a rear guard—these are the gray-brown birds *without* stripes. As for the Siskins, well, Bradford Torrey says of them—'Every bird is in stripes, and none of them could be dressed more strictly in fashion if their costumes had come straight from Paris.' That was many years ago, and fashions have changed; but the prisoner's garb does not, and here are birds o' freedom' in the striped suit—a costume forever fixed. How very unfortunate! But I can assure you, Boy Blue, *this* striped costume was worn thousands of years before fashions and prisoners were ever thought of.

"Like the other winter birds the Siskins are delightfully heedless of our presence. Seeds of weeds, catkins, and cones form their luncheon. They are pretty fellows in stripes of brown and gray, with a tinge of pure yellow midway on the wing and upper part of the tail; they resemble the Redpoll, but there is not a particle of crimson in their make-up. Here



to-day, and there to-morrow perhaps miles away, it is fortunate when you do meet with a flock. Dear me! something must have startled them—or possibly they have taken me at my word, and concluded it was time to be off! Away they go like autumn leaves whirled aloft in a gust of wind. But they will alight again at no great distance. So they move from place to place and scour the country far and near for food. It is always food or else—and this is my own opinion—thrilling adventure they're after, for they seem to be bent upon seeing as much of the world as possible within an hour of the clock. They never stay in one place long unless there is an abundance of food in sight. He is fortunate who may find their nests among the White Mountains, for I am almost convinced that the bird does make his summer home among the great hills up the valley. I have met him in July on the slopes of Mt. Lafayette; but how can one be sure of the twig-built nest unless Mrs. Sally Siskin is perched hard by with trouble in her eye? You have heard the Siskin's thin, wheezy, *see-er* call note; I can tell you very little about the song, except that it resembles the jolly, lively chirpings of the Goldfinch who is his near relative. If we would hear it, we must travel far to the north. Now what do you spy? Still another little bird, but very dark? Let me see—now I have him—the Snow-

bird, otherwise known as the slate-colored Junco; another gentle and unsuspicious character, a winter visitor just now, if you please, but next June, either here or nearer Old Lafayette, with a jingling song like the trill of a sleigh-bell he'll proclaim himself a summer guest. That is a good long season in which we may learn something of his habits. It is very evident he prefers a cool climate and bracing air, for he retreats to the mountain tops in summer. We are near enough for you to note his trim, slender figure and the close fitting suit of soft slate-gray. You remember meeting him last summer in the valley and on the mountain."

"Surely I do," responded the boy, "but I didn't recognize him this time, and do not see the white apron yet which you said he always wore. I can't see it even with the help of my glass."

"O that is not surprising. Watch him closely as he changes his position and you will catch a glimpse of the contrasting slate-gray of his vest and the white of his apron, it is not so plainly seen as he stands on the snow with head bent over, nor is the flesh-colored bill, either. But when he stretches his neck you will see both without any trouble. Then, again, the marginal, white feathers of the tail do not show up well against the snow. One has to watch for a

favorable light or the right kind of a background to see these very important points, and I am very ready to admit, in this respect, a dead bird in the hand is worth a score of live ones in the bush.

There are two or three little fellows beyond the Junco which look to me like Tree Sparrows; they are on the withered stalks of golden-rod which are being inspected in a very thorough manner. Perhaps these are the birds that have already found your window shelf—there is no telling; we will expect them as usual at the house for afternoon tea at four-thirty sharp! They are habitually prompt, that we know from experience. There are a few facts about the Tree Sparrow worth remembering. He appears down this way about the first of October, stays through the winter, and then passes northward in the spring about the middle of April. Many individuals like our mountain tops well enough to remain in New Hampshire the year around, but they come down in the valleys in search of food as soon as the snow covers the summits. Like the Junco, this sparrow makes way with large quantities of weed seed. Over the rugged pasture lands and the rocky hillsides he flies, ever haunting the stalks of Amaranth, steeple-bush, ragweed, and goosefoot, which, however shriveled and withered they appear to us, are veri-

Tree  
Sparrow

table store houses filled with grain for him. They are flitting and jumping among those old golden-rod stems now, finding, no doubt, a sufficient amount of nourishing food in the tiniest of seeds. When the summer comes many will have retreated northward to their Canadian homes, but a number will camp out on our Franconia Mountains. They are more or less confiding and fearless. I have had the pleasure of feeding one little fellow with crumbs from my hand, as I ate my luncheon on the summit of Mt. Osceola. Canada Jays, Juncos, and Field Sparrows often leave the mountain and visit the logging camps in the winter; frequently they are fearless enough to approach the lumberman and accept tidbits from his plate. It is easy to recognize the Tree Sparrow if you are fairly near him and know his marks. The crown is brown-red with the margin brighter than the center, there is a gray eyebrow stripe, and on the middle of the breast is a single, small sepia brown spot; on each wing are two not very distinct ashy bars and some of the inner feathers show whitish margins; otherwise this sparrow looks very much like our common Chippy, in fact, he is often called the Winter Chippy. His song is something like that of the Canary, a lively, chirping one, beginning loud and clear and ending with a trill, but you will hear nothing more than a few scattered *tee-*

*wits* at this time of year, for he is another bird of the extreme north, and breeds from Great Slave lake to Newfoundland. He is well named, as he generally selects some prominent position in a tree to indulge in song; in this respect he is exactly like the Indigo Bunting who invariably takes a front seat in the balcony where he can hear and see everything that is going on in the world. On the whole he is a sociable bird, and no doubt he will make daily calls at your window shelf just as another little fellow did at the shelf of one of my lady friends whose home is also in New Hampshire. A month ago when I called there and sat at her invitation in the privileged seat by the window, the Tree Sparrow came, hopped about leisurely on the shelf, ate the canary seed which was spread for him, and did not mind in the least my arm and hand not fifteen inches away—of course inside the glass. He was on that shelf the better part of an hour, and some of the time I was not perfectly still for I was taking a cup of tea. Do not think the glass was any material barrier of safety from his point of view; he could not understand its nature and moreover he had no reason to think anyone who sat in the window was a menace to his safety. That was a notable afternoon tea for me."

Presently, as Parter and the boy shuffled over the crusted snow, signs of winged life appeared in a

group of pines near them, and the boy with bird glasses at his eyes, declared he could see the white wing-bars very plainly of two greenish or yellowish gray birds perched on the dead bough of a nearer tree.

"They look a little like Canaries," he said, "or like Evening Grosbeaks, but their tails and wings are brown, and there's something the matter with their bills; they are not big and blunt like the Grosbeak's, but longer, with crooked, sharp points."

"White-winged Crossbills," explained Parter, and adjusted his own glasses for a better view of the birds.

The boy looked mystified. "But I thought you said Rosy Crossbills the other day, and these are gray with a yellow tinge."

"That is true, I did say rosy, but rose is the male bird's color. These are the females, and as I have often said, the female is a puzzling character to a beginner like yourself anxious to know as much as possible in a short time. You have sharp eyes and have discovered at once the all-important point—colors aside—about these birds, that is, their twisted bills; one mandible laps over the other. It is an example of what a scientist calls 'special adaptation.' So is an iron nutcracker; it is especially adapted to the purpose of cracking nuts, not including the



kind carried on the shoulders of scatter-brained boys! These twisted bills (the upper one crosses either way) are especially adapted to the untwisting of tight-scaled cones of various trees belonging to the Pine Family; the birds are experts in the art of extracting the seeds. One reads of people sitting under pine trees who have had showers of cone-scales fall over them and never suspected that a flock of hungry birds was busy overhead. That sounds like one of the familiar 'fish' stories, but, no doubt, it is every bit true. To be sure, I can't imagine Boy Blue seated under the tree with a flock of birds in its branches overhead—and not knowing it!"

"No, not on your life," came the prompt response.

"And again," added Parter, "I suspect fifty Cross-bills cutting as many pine cones to pieces in one old tree would easily disturb the enemy beneath and bombard him out of position by heavy shelling! Maybe if we ventured within the piney area we might witness the operation at short range without scaring the birds out of position, for I know there are many among the pine branches; let's try. There must be some rosy males about and they are worth seeing. They are a peach-blow pink or light æsthetic crimson entirely different from the rich Venetian red of their relative, the Red Crossbill, and more refined——"

"There! I see one now," excitedly interrupted

the boy, "on this lower branch; he is a beauty, white wing-bars, dark brown wings and tail, head and breast like a rosy peach, and that awful bill with a twist in it—if he sang he'd twist the words of 'Frank Smith was a black-smith,' to Smank Frith was a slack myth," and the boy giggled, "but he is as beautiful as the Pine Grosbeak that came to me the other day, in spite of his bill; probably that's a cracker jack for nuts, though."

"But it does contribute toward a wry face," added Parter. "Some writers say these Crossbills are more shy and suspicious than other winter birds, but I have not found it so; and, you see, here we are within twelve feet of five birds which take no notice of us—they can hear us talk too. However, they are preoccupied in hunting for seeds fallen on the snow. Over our heads are a score or more individuals who are not in the least worried by our nearness to them, but if we waved an arm, snapped a twig, moved suddenly or spoke loudly, a change would occur, and away they would fly 'like chaff before the wind of heaven.' I shall never forget a certain winter's day in Cambridge in the year when there was a great migration of these Crossbills southward. One of the birds was hopping on the rail of a low wooden fence next the sidewalk a short distance ahead of me, and I slowed up in passing lest he should be frightened



WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL



RED CROSSBILL

away; but the bird paid no attention to me, hopped down on the snow at the edge of the walk in the search of a few seeds under a bush, and allowed me to pass within twelve inches of where he stood. It altogether depends upon the character of your movements whether the bird stays or flies. And as for the need of keeping absolutely quiet, that is by no means necessary, for these birds, you notice, are keeping up a constant chatter among themselves while they are feeding; they're absorbed in their own conversation and are too polite to resent my idle gossip! They also, come from the cool Canadian forests of the far north, and when a great fire occurs there destroying vast numbers of pine cones, they fly down here after more food of the kind they like. It is not the violent cold that drives them from their northern home, nor is it always heavy snows; it is hunger.

“This is not the commoner of the two Crossbills, the other, the American or Red Crossbill is really the one we ought to have met here. But things and happenings are seldom governed by rules, and it was many, many years ago I met my first Crossbill which was also the ‘White-wing.’ The Red Crossbill is a handsome, rather æsthetic red, I might call him in his brighter phase, Turkey red, but his actual color variations are considerable, including bright and dull orange. I

**Red  
Crossbill**

mean by that that he does not 'tune up' to anything approaching the color of the Scarlet Tanager, and even Turkey red cloth as a background for him would look a bit too lively. He does not remotely resemble the peach-blow colors of this bird we have just seen, and I'm afraid if I painted him it would be necessary to use more Venetian red than vermilion, and a great many little touches among the red of yellow-green and rusty orange. Truth to tell, if I may be allowed to express it in slang, he is a 'brick of a bird' with a horn-yellow bill and brown wings and tail. He is said to nest as far south as New York, in the spruce forests of the Adirondacks, but in other parts of the State he is an irregular winter visitor. I have no record of his nesting in the White Mountains, although he is far from uncommon through our spruce woodlands in his periodical visitations, during August and October as well as in the winter. If he is not here where we are now, it is very possible he may be among the spruces in the Franconia Notch north of us. He is known to have nested in Craftsbury, Vt., scarcely sixty miles northwest, and is said to breed in the Appalachian Range from Georgia to New England.

"The nest is placed in an evergreen tree, and not very far from the ground, it is built of twigs, grasses, and rootlets, and is lined with moss, horsehair, and



perhaps a few feathers. The eggs are pale dull green thickly flecked about the larger end with brown. I tell you this so, if it happens in later years that you climb one of these mountains and find such a nest from five to fifteen feet high in an old spruce tree and the nest contains just one tiny brick-colored feather, you will know exactly who its owner is.

Like his relative the White-wing, the Red Crossbill has a gentle and unsuspicious disposition; but a whole flock will occasionally take sudden flight without any reason whatever. It is the same old story of one frightened sheep jumping over the fence and all the rest following. The birds fly like the Goldfinch in dipping lines like the waves of the sea, and the flock keeps together in fairly good shape; there are very few stragglers. They feed exactly as the White-wings do on the cone seeds, dropping the scales and the tiny wings of the seed in a shower below, and, just as you saw these birds do a few minutes ago, they perform gymnastic feats with bill and claw around the pine or spruce cone not within easy reach. This bird is also a great twitterer while feeding, and his song in the springtime is a delightful stringing together of trills and musical chirps not unlike a mixture of the songs of the Goldfinch and Indigo Bunting.

“Perhaps you may wonder what sort of a bedroom all these winter birds occupy during the freezing

cold nights. Well, that does seem problematic, but after all it is not a great mystery. In the first place there are many sheltered nooks in the young and vigorous spruces, hemlocks, firs, and, better yet further south, arbor-vitæ and cedars whose foliage and branches are more closely interwoven. Then, in the second place, the birds snuggle together to keep warm—and there you are! A feather bed on either side of you and a fir blanket over you, what more would you ask even with the mercury below zero?”

“But Parter, wait a moment,” interrupted the skeptical boy, “I want to know how you spelled that ‘fur blanket.’”

“I didn’t spell it, I merely mentioned it, but incidentally I’ll add it’s a close bit of needle-work greatly superior to that of the pine tree, and when you are camping out without a hammock in your outfit, the balsam fir branches make a famous bed on a summer’s night. But let me tell you what Mr. Ernest Harold Baynes says about this gentle and fearless Red Crossbill, the bird which came and shared my luncheon on one of these Franconia Mountains many years ago; for, like boys, he seemed to relish salted peanuts, and I gave him some after carefully removing the superfluous salt.”

Parter sat down on the snowless end of an oak log

jutting from a stack piled up by the lumbermen, and drew a book from the capacious pocket of his fur coat. Always on the side of a branching road leading toward the forest one was sure to meet with a stack of heavy logs piled parallel with one another and with the road but quite a little higher, resting upon a low frame or foundation of timber, so arranged for convenient and easy rolling upon the logging sled.

"Now," said Parter, "let's rest our stiff legs a bit and read. This book was bought for you with the idea that it would help you in the entertainment of birds. Few people realize that the so-called wild bird is really as tame or tamer than the caged Canary. Listen: 'We had seen the birds swarming over a ruined building, and discovered with the aid of a field-glass that apparently they were nibbling the mortar which held the bricks together. We got some of this mortar, pounded it up, and scattered it on well-trampled snow in the garden, and down came the Crossbills, not only that day but every day for weeks. The flock usually arrived between half-past seven and eight o'clock in the morning, and were engaged in eating mortar until between one and two in the afternoon. . . . They became very fearless, coming to the windows, allowing us to walk about among them when feeding, alighting freely on our hands and heads, and even permitting us to pick them up, one

in each hand. When sometimes I lay on the ground among them, they would poke their heads into my sleeves and if my ulster was not tightly buttoned, some of them would creep inside.'¹ That is sufficient proof, I think, to show that at least one wild species is about as tame as we could expect it to be if it lived under our very roof. Yet where does the bird come from? Central Alaska, northern Mackenzie, Ungava, and Newfoundland—the wilds of all North America. There he sings throughout the lengthening days of spring to the silence of a trackless wilderness; there above the shores of Hudson Bay where the great discoverer was set adrift with his companions in an open boat to die, he sails aloft on tireless wings to his home on the Ungava peninsular, or to the great northwestern territory beyond; there, around the bay, the bird looks down on the tiny camps miles and miles apart where the Indian trapper sets his winter traps for the beaver and the marten, the muskrat and the mink, and lives in comfort and peace—but we! before the end of the first winter we would perish with the fearful, persisting cold."

Parter and the boy were now descending the gentle slope of the side-road, which, although buried under the drifted snow still showed a few recognizable remnants of landmarks.

¹ See *Wild Bird Guests*, p. 141.

“This should take us home in fifteen minutes, or, I mean our legs will if we follow it carefully and do not meet any more birds. They are rather scarce at this moment, and I suspect they have retired to the depths of the forest—but hold! What have we here? What’s that beside the old stump!” and Parter pointed to the shabby remains of an old broken-down yellow birch protruding about two feet above the snow. There was something standing directly beside it, whether a thing of life or not it was difficult to tell; it looked like another snow-bound, brown-flecked stump with a dusky brown cap, two almond-shaped, half-opened eyes and a black bill, the last three forming a perfect triangle.

“A Snowy Owl, on my life! The first one I’ve seen in many years. Observe the scamp; he stands beside that stump, as much as to say  
‘I’m another, just come this way and  
you will see the difference.’ If any kind  
of a small rodent did happen to come within reach of his claws he would pounce upon it like a flash of lightning. Ah, the wily creature! He sees us, but is still immovable, he will remain so as long as it seems safe, then, if we approach—pst! he goes on noiseless wings and swift. His scientific name is *Nyctea nyctea*, in plain English, a night bird of the night; but just at present he is evidently a night bird

**Snowy  
Owl**

of the day. Names often fail to carry the truth along with them, we find that out with very little study; this hunter works in daylight quite as well as he does in twilight, and I suspect his business is not perfectly successful with anything less than moonlight. He certainly ought to have been included among the other creatures in Robert Louis Stevenson's little nocturne:

“While birdies sleep in the forks of the trees,  
The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,  
The howling dog at the door of the house,  
The bat that lies in bed at noon,  
All love to be out by the light of the moon.”

“There he goes now,” was the agitated exclamation of the boy, as the owl ducked its head and sailed away toward the woods, “My! what wings!”

“Yes, he is a big bird; if you could measure those wings from tip to tip, you would find the expanse something more than four feet”; said Parter, “they work silently too, it would never do to make so much as the rustle of a feather when you swoop down on a field mouse or a duck. The Snowy Owl manages his wings quite as skilfully as my Manx cat managed his bell; he used to hunt years ago in these very fields, and although the bell attached to his collar was large and noisy it never gave a whispering tinkle when he



was on the trail of a mouse. The bird has very feathery feet—paws—I may say, and when he pounces on any live thing even as big as the rabbit, it is a pretty serious piece of business. Mr. Elon Howard Eaton says, in his *Birds of New York*. 'The duck hunters are sometimes surprised by its descending upon their decoys while they are concealed in their blinds.' The food of this Owl in his far northern home (the entire arctic region) consists of lemming voles—these are little creatures like field mice, about four inches long—hares, ptarmigan, water-fowl, and fish. He does get a few birds, but not very many, of that we are sure. The bird nests as far south as central Ungava and Keewatin, the territories either side of Hudson Bay; and he visits the northern United States in irregular intervals of a few years in rather large numbers, but always one can count on a few visitors for every year. In 1918, a very considerable number were reported from Massachusetts. It is wise not always to consider a bird is as rare as some book may say. I told you I had not seen this Snowy Owl for many a year, and some author may rightly call him an irregular winter visitant, or an accidental visitant, or a casual one, according to the particular spot on the map in your geography where his book is written. Yet this rare and beautiful big white Owl which has posed beside the stump especi-

ally for your camera, is, so far, the only one we have met, though I know very well there are other commoner ones up in the woods behind us; indeed; the woods may be full of them—that's the lumberman's expression—but they're not in evidence. Really, if we could sift a whole square mile of winter woods it would be sheer luck to find more than two owls, and I would not dare suggest what their names might be. So you may consider yourself especially favored—favored in more than one way for you have had a fine opportunity to see yourself what the so-called protective coloring of animals means. We might have passed the Owl for the twin of that brown and white stump had I not been on the lookout for something other than a flitting bird. Whether he chose his position by accident or not has nothing to do with the case; he resembled a stump and that is enough, a passing rodent might have passed too near and—*ker-plunk!* There would have been one stump too many for rodent! You noticed, too, that the Owl's eyes were half closed; well, its still daylight and too much of that with the dazzling snow is a bit blinding, so why open your eyes wide? But one can be pretty sure the final capture of the rodent would be an 'eye opener' as well as a sudden cure for pretended indifference, and cause an instantaneous rolling up and tucking away of that strange nictitating eye-



SNOWY OWL



Northern Shrike

lid which has interested us on several occasions before.

“Yonder on swiftest of wings goes another scamp, a gray-coated Shrike, who disappears in the woods along with the owl; but he will give a  
**Northern** wide berth to that snowy rascal. This  
**Shrike**

Northern Shrike, or Butcher-Bird, a winter visitor only, comes down from Canada in November and goes back in March. His proper home is away in the north between Alaska, Ungava, and Quebec, but he will migrate as far south as Texas or Virginia. His near relative, the Loggerhead Shrike, prefers the cultivated country between Minnesota, eastern Kansas, southern Quebec, New Brunswick, and Virginia. You see these territories scarcely overlap; it is therefore evident the Northern Shrike must like the cool wildernesses of the North, and the Loggerhead the meadows and hillsides of a milder climate where grow the thorn trees and honey locusts. Food has little to do with the choice as it is just as plenty and good in one place as the other.

“The English Sparrow of our towns and the venturesome field mouse of our meadows are often the victims of the Shrike’s hawklike beak. With one savage thrust of his bill he kills his prey, carries it to the nearest thorn tree, barbed wire fence, or

lightning-rod, hangs it there for the time being, and then proceeds to chase a passing bird.

“The two Shrikes are much alike, with tail, wings, beak, and bar over the eye sooty black; but the Northern is the paler gray of the two particularly in the region of the forehead, and its under parts are faintly barred with black; it is also a bit larger. Though a handsome bird the Shrike is really a destructive and cruel character. Lady Macduff’s expression fits him—‘he wants the natural touch.’

“We are home again, and without a glimpse of the Acadian Chickadee. The veil of twilight is dropping fast, but that Owl has all his eye-curtains drawn wide and watches for his prey. There are other hunters after game too, we have crossed the trails of a fox and a weasel, I hope none of them will find our Crossbills; I am quite confident that the owl, fox, and weasel will not make game of each other! If they did! Well:

“When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war.”



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MIGRATIONS OF BIRDS

"Now," said Parter, in a cheery voice and with an evident relish in the prospect of explaining some of his ideas about the migrations of birds to Boy Blue, "let's look over the maps of North and South America and find out where the birds are coming from this spring, the routes they take, and where they are going to. It's now nearly the first of April and if the little rascals don't fool us this year a good many will pass this way in an interrupted procession; first a few, then bunches of them so you may pick your bird from any tree with a flash of your binoculars.

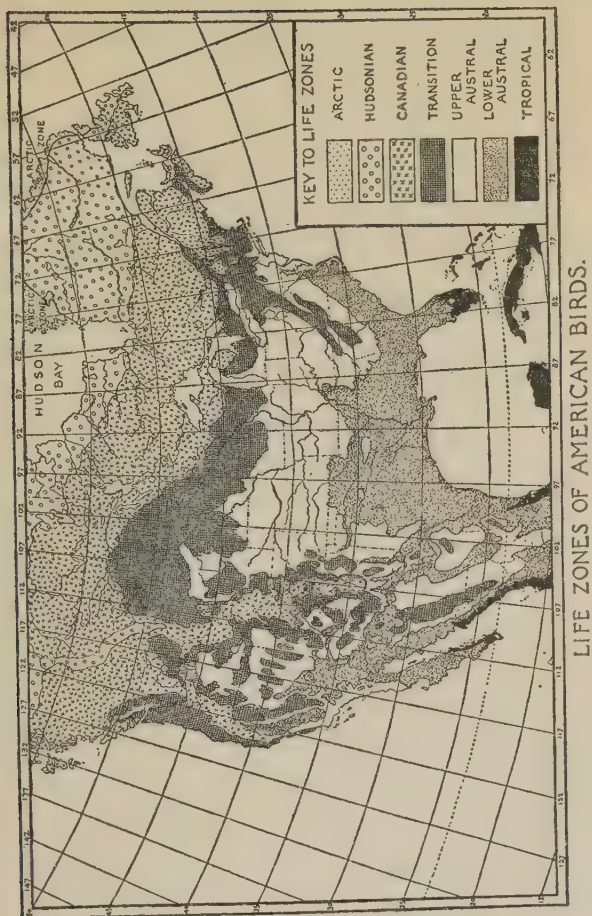
"Here are a few records of the routes of migration; you can see with a glance of your eye how long the wonderful trackless highways of the air are. How easily—if you have any imagination—you can picture the Bluebird making the azure sky still bluer, the Oriole gilding it with his burnished gold, the Scarlet Tanager flashing it with his flaming vermilion, and the Pine Grosbeak softening it with his tinge

of rose. Suppose we set our imagination awing and fly with these greatest travelers of the world. Do you remember those lines *To the Cuckoo* of John Logan, the English poet who lived long ago in the time of George Washington?

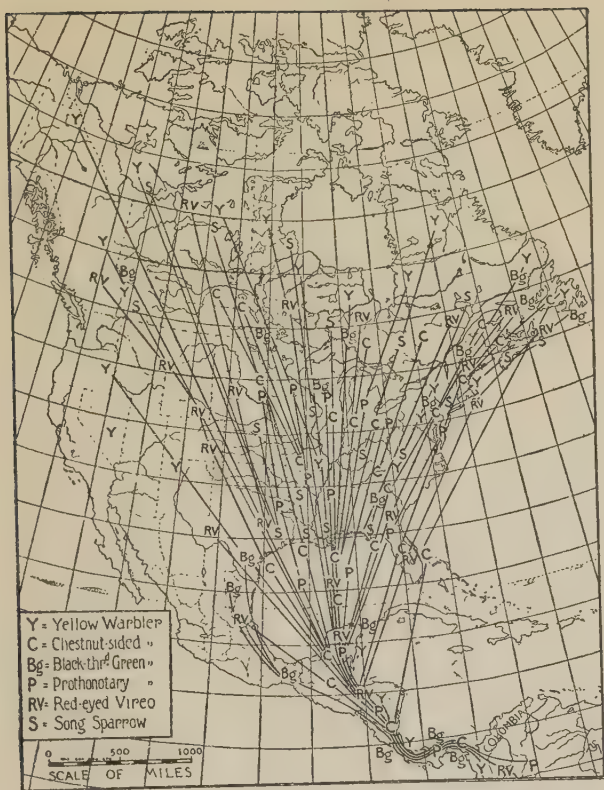
“O, could I fly, I’d fly with thee!  
We’d make, with joyful wing,  
Our annual visit o’er the globe,  
Companions of the spring.

There’s truth in that as well as poetry, for men to-day are devoting their best efforts to following the birds through the air in flying machines. At least one gets a magnificent bird’s-eye view of all the world if one escapes a broken neck; but the tiny warblers do not worry their heads about neck, wings, legs, or any other part of their anatomy—they just fly, and do it as easily and naturally as you put one foot before the other in walking. A ten-mile flight to them is about as easy as walking across the street is to you.

“Look at the lines on one of these maps, they represent thousands of miles of travel. Four birds, the Blackpoll Warbler, Olive-backed Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Belted Kingfisher cover something over 7000 miles in their travels, the Olive-backed Thrush actually over 8000 miles. Old Mother Earth, you know, who is as broad as she is





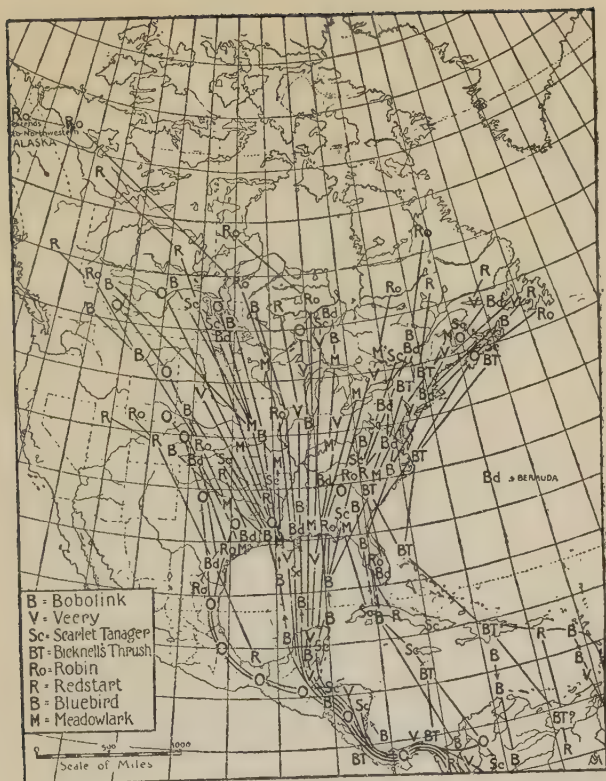


MIGRATORY ROUTES OF THE BLACK-THROATED GREEN, CHESTNUT-SIDED, YELLOW, AND PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS, RED-EYED VIREO AND SONG SPARROW. Only the four species, Bg, C, S & P, halt short of the limits of Colombia; the eighteen other species (see maps) fly on, many hundreds of miles beyond.

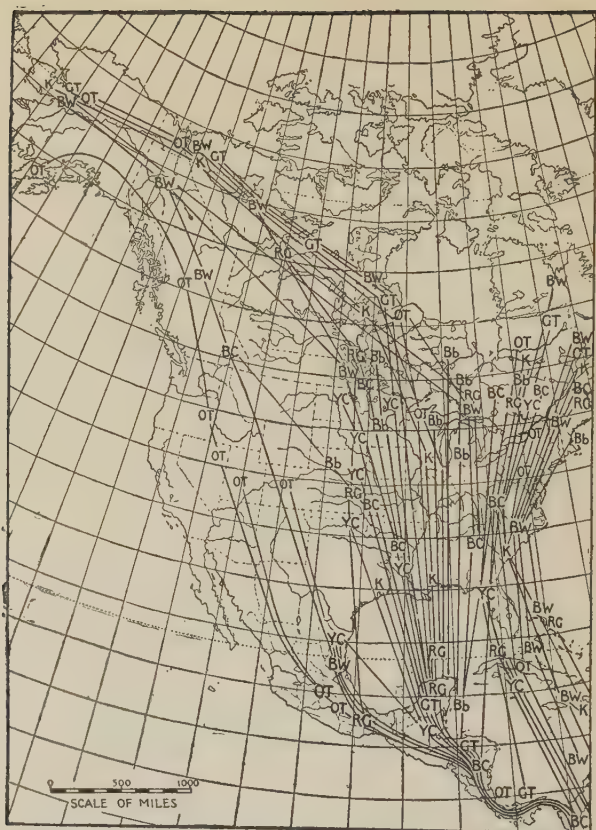


THE WINTER HOMES OF SIXTEEN OF OUR SUMMER BIRDS  
 MOST OF WHOSE MIGRATORY ROUTES EXCEED 5000 MILES  
 a distance double that from Philadelphia to San Francisco in an air line.  
 The route of the OT is about 8500m long, that of the GT 7500m. BW 7200m.  
 K 7000m. RV 6600m. B 6500m. BC 6400m. YC 6000m. Y 6000m. R 5600m.  
 Sc 5100m. RG 5100m. Bb 4800m. O 4700m. V 3600m. BT? 3400m.  
 Bicknell's Thrush migrates to the Bahamas and Haiti, and probably to Venezuela.





MIGRATORY ROUTES OF THE BOBOLINK, VEERY, SCARLET TANAGER, BICKNELL'S THRUSH, ROBIN, REDSTART, BLUEBIRD AND EASTERN MEADOWLARK. The Robin, Bluebird and Meadowlark migrate only as far as the Gulf Coast. The lines indicate the general direction of flight. Most courses spread laterally before the finish, many are roundabout, all vary very little from the ancient plan, and few are absolutely known in every detail. Map of So. America has initial key for other species.



MIGRATORY ROUTES OF THE YELLOW-BILLED AND BLACK-BILLED CUCKOOS, OLIVE-BACKED AND GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSHES, BLACKBURNIAN AND BLACK-POLL WARBLERS, KINGFISHER, AND ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK. The distance covered by four of the species from Alaska to the shores of South America is about 6000 m, and to their southernmost halt from 7000 to 8500 miles. The range of the BW, K, OT & GT is east to Newf, the BC to P Edwards I., & RG to Cape Breton I.

long, is about 7918 miles through, so it is not difficult to imagine the Olive-back or the Blackpoll diving into a subterranean tunnel at Panama and coming out of it in Java 40 days later, doing the journey at the rate of 200 miles in a day though he rests and eats on the way, for that is the speed which Prof. W. W. Cooke, of the United States Biological Survey, claims the Blackpoll makes between Minnesota and Alaska!

“Of course birds do not fly in a truly straight line, that would be impossible in this round world, but, comparatively speaking, they do travel a large part of their way in what we choose to term a bee line. My map lines are generally straight, but they must not be taken too literally; there was not room to place all inland where they belonged, consequently those well out in the Atlantic represent routes a considerable distance within the coast line. For example, our little Chestnut-sides crosses the sea from Newfoundland, follows the hills and the coast all the way down to Florida, and then crosses the Gulf to Yucatan and Central America; the more western individual passes southward through the Gulf States, Texas, and eastern Mexico. Thus, when a waste of water appears in front of him the little bird throws fear to the winds and takes a bee line for the point at which he aims; the sea does not faze him in the least,

over he goes sailing sometimes scarcely fifteen feet above the waves. The island of Nantucket is not only a stopping place for birds but a way-station though it lies twenty-five miles out at sea. Many birds in their northerly course follow the coast line of Long Island, cross from Montauk Point to Block Island, thence pass to Martha's Vineyard and from there to Tuckernuck and Nantucket; others may be blown over the sea by the west wind in a course 230 miles long from Barnegat on the New Jersey shore straight for the island.

"The only way to be sure our bird covers the air from one station to another is to catch him, band one of his legs with a tiny metal label bearing the date and place of the banding, and then give him his liberty; after that if the little wanderer should happen to be captured alive or picked up dead a thousand miles from home, we know exactly where he went and very nearly by what route. But we should remember he might claim the wide, wide world for his home, so one could not say he had gone astray. Occasionally birds are driven far out to sea by storms and gales of wind and many lose their lives, but quite as often they survive the severe wind-tossing and find their way back to land again.

"Their migratory routes are fixed from ancient days, and there is extremely little variation from the



Redstart  
(above)

Pine Warbler  
(below)





universal rule of 'follow my leader.' The route is often not one we would choose as shortest, easiest, or safest. The birds run fearful risks, they cross the Gulf blindly ignorant of the threatening tempest, fly into it, and perish by thousands. The Prothonotary Warbler of the Atlantic States on his journey south goes only as far as northern Florida and then crosses the Gulf directly by a 700 mile route to southern Yucatan instead of proceeding by way of Cuba. Numbers of species cross the Caribbean Sea to Venezuela without regard for the land route *via* Panama or the more easterly way by the string of islands called the Lesser Antilles. We know extremely few of the birds' courses in every detail, but we do know, in a general way, that after reaching Yucatan in their northern course many species mixed together fly across the Gulf in directions that spread out like a fan.

"Scarcely any one of the Warblers flies less than 3000 miles, though the southern Maryland Yellowthroat is an exception and remains not very far from his own home town, as you might say, during the winter season.

**Pine  
Warbler**

The Pine Warbler is another home body. He is rather a rare bird in our Northern States, you find him in the pine woods or not at all. His colors are pale olive and brownish gray, with two dull white

bars on the wings, throat and breast greenish yellow, and underparts of a paler tone. His simple song resembles that of the Chipping Sparrow. This Warbler belongs in the southern pine forests which he seems to think are good enough for an all-the-year-round residence. On the other hand the Blackpoll is the greatest traveler of his family as his shadow dots the Americas from Brazil to Alaska. The Myrtle is the hardiest fellow of the family for he faces the blasts of old Boreas, the north wind laden with sleet and snow. Like the Chickadee he wears a waistcoat gray but striped with black and patched with yellow. He draws the line at South America, and in his autumnal, southerly course from the tree limit in Alaska stops somewhere in the vicinity of the Panama Canal or among the larger islands of the West Indies.

“The Worm-eating Warbler is another bird which does not care for South America. He is a dainty, soberly-dressed character with a buff and black striped cap, a coat of light olive green and underparts of palest buff. Indeed, he is worthy of a better name. Even if worms are the chief of his diet that fact ought not to have been blazoned forth in his name, or, if it had to be, why not use musical Italian instead of blunt English, for *Piccoletto vermine mangiatore*

**Worm-  
eating  
Warbler**



BLUE-WINGED WARBLER  
(above)

WORM-EATING WARBLER  
(below)



Hooded Warbler  
(above)

Yellow-breasted Chat  
(below)

sounds much better, and who cares what it means! This little fellow is not very common in the north country; only occasionally you find him beyond the Mississippi Valley in wooded river-lands as far north as New York City and southern Connecticut. His migration lines would be nearly parallel with those of the Prothonotary Warbler, but he does not fly farther south than Cuba and Panama, and sometimes he remains all winter in Florida. His song, like that of the Pine Warbler, also resembles the monotonous notes of the Chippy. Now Mr. Bicknell says, 'the songs of no three birds known to me are more alike than those of the Worm-eating Warbler, the Chipping Sparrow, and the Slate-colored Junco.' That is so, they are similar, but you will remember I have told you each species of birds has its own way of singing, and, even if these ways seem alike, there is a difference in the pitch of voice or the kind of tone. You know how quickly you may recognize a friend by the tone of voice. Therefore, if I compared these three bird voices with each other and likened them to the ring of table glass I should be inclined to say the Chippy's voice was like a five-cent tumbler, the Junco's like one of cut glass, and the Worm-eating Warbler's like another of delicate Venetian glass.

"There is still another little fellow called the Blue-winged Warbler who pushes his southern journey a

little farther beyond Panama and touches Colombia but at a much later time than the Prothonotary. He

**Blue-winged Warbler** is also a southern bird and I wonder we did not meet him at Chattanooga, but, like the Prothonotary, he is a commoner resident of the Mississippi Valley. He is

distinctly yellow with a black bar from bill to eye, an olive back, and bluish gray wings and tail; on the wings are two white bars. Rarely he flies as far northward as Minnesota, New York, and Massachusetts. His sibilant song of only two syllables is like that of the Golden-wing, devoted to the letter Z. *La-zzzzzzzzz* he calls very early in the morning until you are ashamed to lie abed any longer.

“Among the Warblers which do not fly as far as South America is also the beautiful but rare Cape

**Cape May Warbler** May. He is very uncommon in New England though he flies beyond to Hudson Bay and almost as far as Great

Slave Lake; indeed, he makes his summer home almost entirely in Canada, flying northeast as far as Nova Scotia. It is said a few of these Warblers nest at Lake Umbagog north of us. He is a pretty fellow with a chestnut ear-patch, a yellow breast striped with black, an olive back flecked with black, and a dull white patch on his wings. His song is similar to that of the Blackpoll—all on one note.



“About the first week in April, when the Prothonotary arrives in northern Florida by the route straight across the Gulf from Central America, appears the Hooded Warbler from Panama. He would arrive in Englewood where your own home is a month later, covering the distance of 1000 miles at the rate of 33 miles per day, and, as you know, he can fly that number of miles in less than an hour’s time, his course is plainly a leisurely one, with many long halts at the luncheon counters of way stations. He is a prettily marked bird with a black cap and chin, a yellow mask and vest, and an olive coat. In markings his head is quite the reverse of the Maryland Yellow-throat’s black mask, yellow chin, and olive crown. Somebody—I think it is Mr. Chapman—has said he seems to sing, ‘You must come to the woods or you won’t see me,’ in *presto* time. But I do not catch so many syllables as that—they should count but eight or nine, like *Dear-y, dear-y, dear-y, d’ye see me?* The bird is common in the Mississippi Valley but very rare in New England beyond Connecticut.

**Hooded  
Warbler**

“The Bay-breasted Warbler, another uncommon bird up our way, also indifferent to the attractions of South America beyond Colombia, is only seen in southern New England in passing to its summer

home among the evergreen forests of Canada, or beside Lake Umbagog in our own State, or in the woods of Maine. He is a handsome Warbler, Bay-breasted too, with chestnut red on his throat and Warbler crown, black over his cheeks, and pale buff on the sides of the neck and over the under parts. In May we might find him, perhaps, in the company of his relative the Cape May Warbler at Lake Umbagog scarcely more than an afternoon's trip northward by automobile. But the chances of seeing him if you go with that purpose in mind would be slight indeed. It is always the unsuspected which turns up unexpectedly. The Bay-breasted prefers the far-away cool woodland retreats of Newfoundland, Keewatin, and Saskatchewan. The greater number of them fly northward directly across the Gulf from Yucatan and proceed up the Mississippi Valley. A few on a more easterly course would pass New York City about May 10th and arrive at Lake Umbagog two weeks later."

"But how about the dates, Parter?" questioned Boy Blue. "Are the birds always so regular each year that you can tell just when they should leave South America, or cross the Gulf, or arrive in New York? They can't carry pocket calendars under their wings, and I don't see how they can hit, say, upon the first day of April or within several days either

side of it and decide that that is the best time to arrive in some particular place. For instance, how can the Bobolink tell away down in Paraguay just when to 'pull up stakes,' as you say when we are breaking up camp, and go on his way to Massachusetts or New Hampshire?"

"Well, I might answer that question, or rather your series of questions," replied Parter with thoughtful look, "Yankee fashion. How do you know when to wake up in the morning? You seem to be fairly lively if not noisy with charming regularity about six-fifty; I imagine you may possess a mental alarm clock. How *do* you know when to awake?"

"But I don't know, I just wake up!"

"Precisely; and the little bird also gets up and flies away. No one can answer your questions with any exactness, but there are many well-known facts which gathered together assist in solving the mystery. The sun shines slanting across the meadows in March and September; in those months more than any others its shifting position in the sky is most noticeable, and the season rapidly changes becoming warmer or colder as the case may be. The appearance of the woods and fields is altered accordingly. Don't for a moment suppose the keen-eyed, sensitive birds do not see and feel the changes just as we do; no doubt they grow restless and think it's time to move on. Then

again there's the question of food of which I have spoken emphatically before. A bird will not remain in any place long when food grows scarce. Ages and ages ago he developed a habit of wandering beyond the limits of his early home and searching the world for more food and for a warmer or cooler climate with mountains or broad fields to suit his fancy. I do not think we sufficiently realize the immense number of years during which the migration of birds has been going on. The bare figures would mount up into hundreds and hundreds of thousands of years! Icy storms from the frozen Arctic and fiery eruptions of volcanoes in the tropics may be destructive, but the little wanderers still wander as they did ages ago.

"You can imagine the half-frozen Yellow Redpoll flying in the face of a spring snowstorm of unseasonable New England and perching on some yet leafless tree lisping discouragingly and very humanly, 'This beats the Dutch, and I've beaten the spring. I'm up against it. Old Daddy Winter's still shaking his feather bed; he should have broken camp long ago.'

"You see bird calculations are not always as clever as we suppose. Then again, even when in a certain region food remains plentiful and the temperature has not really changed, such birds as the Scarlet Tanager and the Redstart get up and out long before

there's any serious reason for doing so. I think that is what we must call force of habit, something they have inherited from their ancestors of ancient days when glaciers reached out unduly early with their icy grasp and in company with snow flurries.

“Birds are creatures of habit; if they were brought up like a lumberman and his ancestors to fell trees for a living it would never occur to them to change their occupation. They would fell trees till they died! If the primitive Redstarts began to leave British Guiana when the sun swung northward and there was a let-up in the tropical rainfall, you might be sure the whole race of Redstarts would follow in their ancestors' footsteps—or more properly wing-flips—and not change the route a score of miles.

“The Bobolink consults no calendar other than his own instinctive one. There is a change in the temperature of Paraguay of about ten degrees, or a little more, between summer and winter and at most when he makes a start for the United States it is not all of ten degrees, but, however slight the warning may be, he surely feels it. The sun is moving northward and the heat of January is being displaced by the mildness of March; moreover his mind is fixed on the idea that the time of nesting in the far north country is approaching, so up and off he goes in the company of three hundred of his fellows around the

end of March a full week in advance of Mistress Bobolink.

“The Bobolink’s times are fairly regular; he has 3350 miles to travel before he sets foot in Florida 900 of which are over the sea. He reaches there in about four weeks and around the middle of May he is singing on the broad meadows of Vermont, 4750 miles from his South American home. He has made the trip in just 50 days at the average rate of 95 miles in a day, and yet that is rather slow going for birds. Now you may shift this time a week either way and you would still be very near the truth in your dates.

“There are many people who keep strict run of the coming and going of birds year after year and it is not difficult to strike a reliable average date. Lots of things interfere with perfectly regular movements of the birds. Sometimes the winter is severe, the spring comes late, snows, or worst of all storms of icy sleet check their migration and the birds do not arrive on schedule time. Often the season is forward and they arrive before they are due, and again, at times they push ahead with unusual speed and beat the advance of spring itself. Bird flights are inconstant or even rhythmical—to-day you see them, to-morrow you don’t. The migrations are in a succession of waves, with the advance depending



upon weather conditions. You can't get through your railway journey on time if a totally unexpected snowstorm blocks the way. The great blizzard of March 12, 1888, killed thousands of Bluebirds and Robins in the vicinity of New York and temporarily arrested the movements of the rest. Food is an all-important thing in migrating; when you travel long distances by rail there is a dining-car attached to the train. If you go by automobile, either you must stop somewhere for dinner or carry your luncheon along. The case of the Yellow Warbler on the move is not different except that he cannot carry a lunch basket in his bill. His stops by the way are therefore many, and the journey is taken moderately, but he beats the spring. His recorded arrival at Great Slave Lake is May 25th, when the temperature is only 47°, yet he has remained so late in his far, southern home in Peru that when he reaches New Orleans about April 4th, the thermometer is already registering 66°. From there he advances steadily in spite of the dropping mercury, stopping here and there long enough to fill his stomach with food for the 2525-mile journey which still lies before him. On May 5th, he is in Lanesboro, southern Minnesota, with the mercury at 55°, and by May 25th, he finishes at Ft. Resolution, Great Slave Lake, where he has actually overtaken the advance of spring by a gen-

erous margin. There is an unquestionable advantage in this late journeying, the bird encounters fewer storms and food is far more abundant than it is in April. But the Yellow Warbler does not always make a final halt at Ft. Resolution; sometimes he goes on to Kowak in Alaska, a journey of 1500 miles more, arriving promptly on June 10th, when the summer of the far north has not yet begun. There, on what are called the barren lands of the Arctic and among the mountain valleys he finds food in plenty.

“But let us see what the more eastern Yellow Warbler does in his migration. If you take your pencil and trace a straight course—and the Warblers more than any other birds like a straight course—between New York and Caracas, Venezuela, you would soon find yourself away out at sea. You would cross only a corner of Haiti on the way, but there wouldn’t be much food for birds there. The whole distance to the South American coast is around 2400 miles and at a point halfway you would be 300 miles from the Bahamas and 600 miles from the coast of Florida. That is plainly no route which will furnish stop-overs and luncheon counters for weary, hungry birdlings the contents of whose stomachs are quickly digested, and who require easily obtained food in plenty to sustain them in their long flight.

"As I have already told you, Warblers travel mostly at night, therefore, the birds on the way north that leave Cuba at six o'clock in the evening can easily reach the Florida keys inside of three hours; that, in fact, is comparatively slow going for a bird. If the Swallow tried his wings at it, he might cover the distance of 100 miles in much less than an hour. If he could make a spurt from Havana to Tampa at his record speed he would finish the 350 miles in two hours and twenty minutes! That is like taking your breakfast on the train in Washington at eight o'clock and your dinner in Portland down in Maine at noon.

"Very naturally the greater part of a bird's flight is without effort by a method we call volplaning, that is, coasting ahead and slightly downward through the air long distances at considerable speed with motionless, outspread wings; birds do this after propelling themselves upward and forward with a few rapid and powerful flaps of their wings. Watch a sheet of writing paper slide sideways through the air, and you will catch the idea. You must not think in times of migration the birds keep up a break-neck speed without pause. In springtime every other tree tempts them with worm, larvæ, or caterpillar, they spend hour after hour in busy and continuous investigation, and they seldom appear to be in any

haste about it. They do not gobble and go, after the manner of the traveling salesman who chokes down a doughnut with the help of a cup of scalding hot coffee. Well, you see they have no trains to catch, and that makes a great difference.

“Birds as a rule are very deliberate. They do not wear themselves out with hurry, and if it takes all of two weeks to build a nest they take it without worrying a bit. You and I might think we could do the job in two days, but we won’t try for I fear we might make a mess of it. The advance in flight is sometimes at the rate of only fifteen miles a day from station to station, yet the Swallow can fly at the rate of two and a half miles in a minute though there is no appearance of bustle or haste in his flight; how far he could go in one continuous journey at that speed not I nor anyone else may say, but we might safely predict that he would beat ‘the other fellow’ every time.

“I fancy the birds in migrating know every step of the way by several means. In the first place they are keen of sight and quick to recognize their surroundings; memory, therefore, in a limited measure they surely possess, so they are enabled to return to the same spot after an absence of six months or more. In the second place they are expert followers as well as leaders, the younger birds associating

closely with their elders and in careful and faithful imitation following them. But above all the birds possess a sense of direction called the homing instinct, in which we apparently have no share. If, like the X-ray, you could penetrate to the inside of a pigeon's head with your eyes you would see there a very tiny organ in shape reminding one of a microscopic cucumber, within the hollow of which is a ball free to move in any direction. If the bird flies eastward the ball touches the wall in the opposite direction and jostles the memory with the word, 'You're going east'; or if the little bird sails northward, the ball touches the south wall and jostles the memory with, 'You're going north'; thus, he follows his unfailing guide of direction. This strange homing instinct is possessed in large measure by all animals; for cows, dogs, cats, and horses appear to know the direction they ought to take from one place to another whether they know the *road* or not. For example, I bought a cow some years ago, and sent my man by the valley road some five miles to lead it to its new home. A few days after this the cow escaped from the company of the other cows in the pasture and beat it—as you might say—for her old home, not by the road but by a shorter, trackless way through the woods directly over the mountain. So why wonder that some Song Sparrow finds his way

from the Gulf coast, maybe, to Parter's meadow beside the Pemigewasset River, spring after spring, or that the Olive-backed Thrush reappears in a certain locality in Alaska, away from the far Andes of Bolivia or Peru after an absence lasting quite three quarters of the year. Though there is no path through the azure or the clouded sky, yet he has traced his way over those 8000 miles with unerring intelligence.

"Some birds, as I have shown, progress slowly in their migrations, others which travel great distances do so rapidly. The Blackpoll Warbler flies from Atlanta, Georgia to central New Hampshire, a distance of 1000 miles in about twenty-five days; that is, at the slow rate of forty miles in a day. But the Blackpolls away out west spend little time at way-stations. They push on from the southern line of Minnesota over the broad northwestern territories of British America, a distance of 2500 miles, including 500 miles more in Alaska at three times the speed of the eastern birds, or at the rate of 120 miles in a day; that is no less than 3000 miles in twenty-five days. Considering the stop-overs for rest and food the actual wing flights may mean a speed during a few hours of each day more than equal to that of an express train. Prof. W. W. Cooke says of these western birds that 'they make the last part of their



journey, 2500 miles to Alaska, in not over two weeks, or at an average speed of at least 200 miles per day.' Mr. C. J. Maynard estimates the long-distance daily travel of the Blackpoll in the east at nearly an equal speed. Let me read to you what he has written in his *Warblers of New England*. 'The route of migration is doubtless directly north from the coast of South America to Jamaica where the species is a well-known migrant, and across eastern Cuba to the Bahamas. When I saw them, April 26th, they must have recently come from South America. Judging from the short stay that they made on the keys south of Andros each individual would not have remained over a day in either Jamaica or Cuba, thus, in all probability, these birds left South America on April 23d. After crossing the Bahamas they no doubt strike the coast of the United States about in the neighborhood of Charleston, South Carolina' [a distance over the sea of 400 miles], 'and then proceed north quite leisurely. Thus, the first part of the journey of an individual Blackpoll from South America to Charleston is made in four or five days including stops to feed; the remainder of the journey' [to Massachusetts] 'would be made in about fifteen. The Blackpoll, therefore, occupies something like twenty days in all in performing a journey of 2500 miles.' Furthermore, as Mr. Maynard's figures

in relation to the migration of this Warbler are very interesting, listen to what he says about the way in which it migrates and the length and breadth of the procession. 'The width of the region traversed by the Blackpolls from South America to the northern Bahamas is, I should judge, about 100 miles'; [it might actually be as wide as the length of the island of Jamaica, all of 150 miles.] . . . 'the greater number of the spring migrants of this species pass over the eastern part of Cuba in probably the same width of belt, and then on to the Bahamas. It took the flight of Blackpolls as already stated about two days to pass the keys to the south of Andros, and thus we may judge that it took two days for all the members of this species after once starting to leave the coast to get fairly out of South America. By this estimate we find the entire body of Warblers was 100 miles' [or more] 'wide measured by distance, and two days long measured by time. . . . Now when the advanced guard of Blackpolls reached the keys of Andros on the morning of April 26th, the vanguard was still in Jamaica 380 miles behind; that would make the column 380 miles long and something over 100 miles wide. In other words, all the Blackpolls in the world were, at this time confined to an area of about 38,000 square miles. Estimating that each of these square miles of both sea and land then

contained 2000 birds—and according to what I saw at that time this is an underestimate—we should have had the enormous number of 7,600,000 Blackpoll Warblers on their way north at eight o'clock in the morning of April 23, 1884.'

"I have nothing to add to what Mr. Maynard has said except this; the migratory routes of birds are not always as narrow as we suppose, and some of the outflanking lines a hundred miles beyond the coast crossing the Atlantic, on my three maps, actually touch points where the land birds not infrequently may be seen. A little Blackpoll, for example, flew aboard a ship 50 miles off the coast of South Carolina, on April 19, 1898.

"The tracks of this Warbler without doubt extend over the little islands continuing southeastwardly to the South American coast called the Lesser Antilles, for great numbers were seen in October, 1882, on Guadeloupe Island, and many have been captured on Santa Lucia, Barbadoes, Tobago, and Trinidad, the latter close to the Venezuelan coast, 365 miles from French Guiana, and 1050 miles from far-away Para, Brazil, in which places we know the little fellow spends the winter months. I think, on the whole, Mr. Maynard *has* underestimated both the width of the migration area and the number of birds awing. Granting nine tenths of these warblers do

pass over Jamaica—which seems to me very improbable—it is evident more than three quarters of a million birds must pass northward over the more easterly route to Great Inagua of the Bahamas which lies 100 miles to the east of the route over Jamaica, for one of several birds has been caught there so late in the season as April 23d.

“You will notice one very significant thing if you look at my map of South America; there is *not a single Sparrow* included in its list of sixteen birds. Well, the reason is the Sparrows have no need to fly so far. You must remember that their food consists mainly of seeds, in large part those of the weeds, and, as we have thousands of tons of the much-relished stuff along the highways within our own borders, why fly beyond the Gulf Coast to try our luck in foreign lands? If one were a bird and enjoyed the seeds of the ragweed beside the roads of New Hampshire, why should one journey to the banks of the Amazon to hunt the wriggly worm in a dense tropical jungle?

“Among the Sparrows which do not fly far north and whose southern limit is the coast of the Gulf, is the timid Swamp Sparrow who has a ruddy crown like that of the Chippy, and sings the same sort of a monotonous song; he haunts the wet meadow. The other fellows we have frequently met in

early summer—the Chipping, Field, Vesper, and Song Sparrows. Still others which fly far to the north but I'm quite sure do not go south beyond Mexico and the Gulf States are the Lincoln, White-crowned, and White-throated Sparrows; the Savannah ventures farther and crosses the sea to Cuba. These northern birds all appear to possess a most trustful disposition for they are certainly not a bit timid in the presence of man or beast. The Pine Grosbeak among our hills in the winter seems to regard a couple of mountain climbers as familiar and welcome visitors who have come to pay their respects. He is surprisingly tame and alert, at least so reports Mr. George R. Marvin, of Brookline, who saw him far more recently than has Parter, on the summit of our own old Mt. Tecumseh, in February, 1921. Mr. William Brooks Cabot<sup>2</sup> again gives us an amusing instance of a tame bird in his book on Labrador: "A number of beautiful young Eskimo dogs met us outside, fairly leaping over each other at the sound of Daniel's voice. They quieted down, scattering about sleepily in the sun, and the mosquitoes began to settle upon them. Relief came, however, in a very pretty way. A handsome Sparrow, the White-crowned, flew down and hopping up to a dog whose head was conveniently low cleared every mosquito one by one from

<sup>2</sup> *Labrador*, page 59: Small, Maynard & Co., 1920.

his face. The dog did not move though he easily might have snapped up the bird. The animal's face done with, the bird jumped upon its outstretched body and rambled over it, leaving no mosquito behind. The Eskimo call the bird *Kút-shi-tuck*, 'fly-eater.' "

The Sparrows you will readily understand are stay-at-homes principally because they are rugged, horny-billed, ground birds whose food, unlike that of the soft-billed Warblers, which are tree birds, is not seriously diminished by the coming of winter.

"In the class that I call the tree birds are the Vireos, and of course they all go to the tropics for the winter months. You see by two of my maps that the Red-eyed Vireo stops in Central America and at various points along his line of flight to southern Brazil where he joins company with the Bobolinks. The Warbling, Yellow-throated, and Blue-headed Vireos are likewise tropical birds, but sometimes the Blue-headed and the White-eyed Vireos conclude Florida is a good enough winter resort and stop there. The White-eye is a common visitor to the southern Hudson River region, but you would scarcely find him so far north as central New Hampshire. He is distinguished by his creamy yellow wing-bars and his yellow eye-ring. Now these Vireos are soft-billed birds whose diet consists of grubs and worms; so it seems strange that



if they *are* really attracted to a certain region by its food, one species, the Red-eye, should travel between points fully 6000 miles apart and its near relative, the White-eye, frequently to points less than 1200 miles apart. But the reason is not far to discover; doubtlessly some species are more venturesome than others. Some birds are pioneers, the rest, few or many, are not. In the long, long ago—I mean counting the years by tens of thousands until they mount into the hundreds of thousands—there were great ice-caps and glaciers in the northerly part of North America which extended down to where we are now in central New Hampshire. On the hills about us you may find evidences of glacial scratching over the rocks in plenty. By and by, in course of time, the glaciers shrank under changing conditions of climate and sunshine, and spreading forests took their places soon to be invaded by swarms of insects which got the best of it and followed along with the advancing vegetation. Of course the birds did their own advancing too, but more after the insects than the trees, and we must surely count the Red-eyed Vireo among the pioneers.

“Naturally, in the lapse of ages of time the ancestors of closely related species must have been originally of a common type which has undergone some alteration of character and habit. Consequently, the an-

cestors of Bicknell's Thrush—the interesting bird we found on Mt. Mansfield which is a very near relative of the Gray-cheeked Thrush—we should not be surprised to find had lagged behind their relatives who had migrated to far-away Alaska, and contented themselves with our eastern mountain tops and the cooler portion of Nova Scotia.

“The case of these Thrushes is parallel with that of the two Vireos whose migrations we have compared. The Gray-cheek's route is fully 8500 miles long, the Bicknell's is only 3500 miles long. You may draw your own conclusions as to what is the matter with one of the birds, but my own opinion is he has lacked the spirit of exploration. At the same time the Bicknell Thrush might retort in a quotation from Shakespeare.

“Earth's increase, foison plenty,  
Barns and garners never empty,  
Scarcity and want shall shun you.

Why should he wear out his wings in long flights when Nature provides food in plenty for him even on the very summits of the mountains.

“You may ask if the ornithologist had good reasons for separating two Thrushes which had the habit of nesting such a great distance apart. Yes, he did, for the differences which he detected are constant and

never break down under investigation. The Bicknell Thrush is the shorter and smaller bird of the two, the difference being from five sixteenths of an inch, to about an inch and a quarter. The Bicknell is also known as the darker bird though the difference is so slight that you would barely see it with both little creatures in hand. The difference in distribution you see for yourself is very great. The songs, so far, have not been musically compared, but no doubt they are exceedingly similar. In my opinion there must be at least some slight difference detectable which would show up at once on the music staff. Mr. Eliot Blackwelder, after a visit to Alaska in 1915, writes<sup>1</sup> thus: 'The following may have some value as coming from a remote and little-known region: The Gray-cheeked Thrush with the peculiarly wiry, buzzing note of the Veery was heard rather frequently along the flood plains of the Yukon River and Birch Creek, from June 10th to August 15th. The Olive-backed Thrush, very common along the Yukon in June, but much less so in the mountains in July, was last heard August 9th.' Although it is evident Mr. Blackwelder was familiar with both the Veery's and the Olive-back's songs, he does not mention anything about the difference between the Veery's and the Gray-cheek's song, and there does exist a decided,

<sup>1</sup> See the *Auk* for January 1919, page 63.

musical difference, something which must be very close to that uptilt of tones we hear at the close of the Bicknell's song never to be heard in that of the Veery. Thus, the bird that migrates to far Alaska is yet singing to Alaskan ears a song unknown to ours.

“There is one last problematic thing I may tell you connected with the migratory bird. If his colors are brilliant, particularly in strong yellow, golden orange, scarlet, or rose, or in iridescent blue, or blue-green you may be perfectly sure if he appears in any one of the six zones north of the tropical one, each of which is plotted on my map, he has flown beyond the home of his ancestors. That would be, of course, if the tropical zone of the ancestors' time was as narrow, say, a million or more years ago, as it is to-day; but it certainly was not. A superabundance of light really painted the bird's feathers. The sun worked then as it does now with the powerful coloring rays of both ends of the spectrum—the so-called infra-red and the ultra-violet rays. These gave brilliance of plumage to the Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Cardinal Bird, Indigo Bunting, and Prothonotary Warbler. The brighter or darker colors of the Grosbeaks and the Crossbills of the north are no exception to the rule. Either the ancestors of the northern birds belonged in the Hudsonian zone when that was still tropical, or the birds came from some

point nearer the equator, for, in order to possess their bright costumes these would have had to be painted by the strongest rays of the sun.

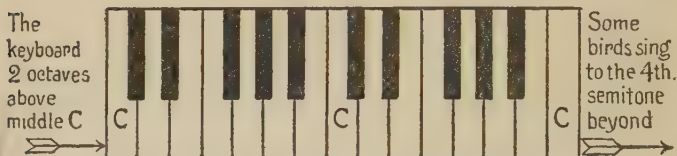
“Well, so long as the birds return to us in the spring or come down from the north and stay with us through the winter, we do not care so much about their ancestors’ original homes. I have shown you something of great interest in the journeyings of our little winged, friends, who, if they left us altogether and forever would only precede our own departure from a world eaten up with bugs and grubs—a world in which even the weeds could not live. But that could never happen, for the truth is, ‘All is well and wisely put.’

“Even when the night comes and the bird sleeps beside his nest in the tree near us, he awakens and sings a note or two to let us know he is at hand. So at last you and I may sing gratefully and reverently before we go to bed these beautiful lines of Philip Stafford Moxom:

“The shadows lengthen, and the air grows chill.  
The sun sinks low; upon the distant hill  
Its rays gleam palely. . . . I will fear no ill.  
The Shepherd’s rod and staff do guide my way  
Through twilight dim and darkening night to day.  
The care be His, the deepening comfort mine.  
The truth begins through all my soul to shine,  
That He who planned knows well how to complete.”

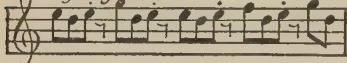
# SONGS OF THIRTY-FIVE OF THE COMMONER SINGING BIRDS

Nearly all are pitched within the two upper octaves of the pianoforte. The Treble clef following represents middle C shifted two octaves up.



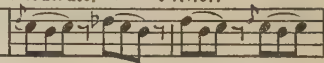
## ROBIN

*Allegro agitato*

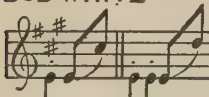


## BLUEBIRD

*Moderato. Minor.*

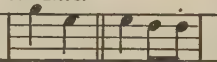


## BOB-WHITE



## CHICKADEE

*Andante.*



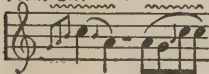
## BL'-BILLED CUCKOO

*Andante.*



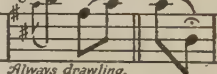
## PHOEBE 8va.....

*Moderato.*



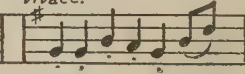
## WOOD PEWEE

*Largo.*



## BALT. ORIOLE

*Vivace.*



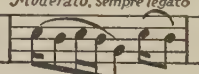
## RED-WG'D BLACKBIRD

*Vivace.*



## MEADOWLARK 8va.

*Moderato, sempre legato*



## JUNCO 8va.....

*Presto.*



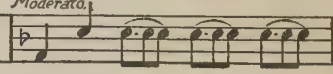
## FIELD SPARROW 8va.....

*Andante.*



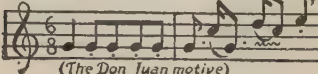
## WHITE-THR? SPARROW 8va..

*Moderato.*



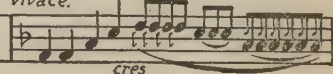
## SONG-SPARROW 8va.....

*Moderato.*



## VESPER SPARROW 8va.....

*Vivace.*



(The Don Juan motive)

*cres.*



## THIRTY-FIVE BIRD SONGS, AND THE WAY TO IMITATE THEM BY WHISTLING

FEW of us realize in what an extremely high pitch of voice the little bird sings. Even one who is an expert whistler and well able to imitate the bird is very apt to fail in *pitch* by whistling a whole octave too low.

The best way to acquaint oneself with pitch is to begin with the piano at the note *C* one octave above *middle C*, and match up with one's whistle. This *C* is in the treble register of any girl's or choir boy's voice, but not very high up; by a careful effort one may whistle as low as that, but it would result in a very weak tone. A good whistler may ascend the scale with tone-matching until he arrives at the topmost *C* where he must stop, though it is possible for him to continue by lipping as many as four semi-tones beyond, to what would be *E* somewhere under the woodwork of the piano! That may be done by rigidly setting the lips to a somewhat horizontal opening and forcing the breath between the tongue and back of the two upper, front teeth. One can



imitate a complaining lost chick by chirping this way and closing the lips suddenly at the end of each chirp. That is the method to be employed in imitating the high-pitched voices of the Warblers, Maryland Yellow-throat, Vesper Sparrow, and Indigo Bunting.

Over the music of some of the birds is the sign *8va.*, meaning one octave higher. Even my high register of the Vesper Sparrow's song is not quite high enough for his average voice; it might have been better to begin with *G* rather than *F*. Some of the White-throat's songs not infrequently begin with highest *B* and end with the *E* under the woodwork, which extreme note it is impossible for anyone to imitate as it is a perfectly clear whistle.

Where the *wavy line* occurs in the music (it is borrowed from the trill sign), that indicates a double tone in the bird's voice. To imitate its effect one must whistle and hum at the same time. A *flat* in the second octave below *middle C* is the tone one naturally employs in combination with one's whistle in imitating the songs of the Phoebe, Red-winged Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Veery, and lightly so in those of the Purple Finch and Warbling Vireo. These birds all sing more or less with double or *buzzing* tones.

Only practice makes perfect. Steadily persisting effort and successful imitation will certainly find its ready response from many of the birds, especially the White-throats and the Chickadees.

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